

DON Q's LOVE STORY

K & HESKETH PRICHARD

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Scene from Douglas Fairbanks' Photoplay, "Don Q, Son of Zorro."

Don Q's Love Story
DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS AS DON Q, SON OF ZORRO.

DON Q'S LOVE STORY

By

K. and HESKETH PRICHARD

ILLUSTRATED WITH SCENES FROM THE
DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS PHOTOPLAY
"DON Q, SON OF ZORRO"



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THE STORY OF "DON Q, SON OF ZORRO"

As produced by Douglas Fairbanks

The locale of "Don Q, Son of Zorro" is entirely Spanish. It is the story of a young California-born Spanish don who is sent to Spain by his father to complete his education. Complications commence when his whip gets him into trouble with the Captain of the Queen's Guards. Inadvertently he clips the tassel off the captain's cap while demonstrating tricks to his friends in a students' club. The eventual result of this is a duel between the captain and the young don. In the midst of the fight a bull charges down the street and, attracted by the red cape of Don Cesar's adversary, immediately charges the officer. The captain's rescue is effected in one of the most spectacular and dangerous scenes ever filmed. The queen, watching from a balcony with members of the court, is urged by her cousin, a visiting archduke, to send for the young Californian. This results in his presentation at court where he learns that his father, Don Diego, is well known.

Don Cesar meets the lady of his heart when he leaps a garden wall to escape the plaudits of the crowd that witnessed his capture of the bull. The girl's father, General de Muro, stands high in the favor of the Spanish crown.

All goes well with the young Don until he is accused of murdering the visiting archduke, whose untimely end forms the dramatic turning point in the story. To escape disgrace Don Cesar feigns suicide,

THE STORY OF "DON Q, SON OF ZORRO"

becomes the mysterious Don Q and sets out to clear his name and find the real culprit. This leads to a series of thrilling and astounding adventures, in which he is aided by his father who, hearing of the son's plight, rushes to his aid from California. Fighting side by side, Don Q and his sire perform many feats of valor, the son ignorant for a time of his father's identity. The climax of the picture comes in the ruined castle of the dilapidated Spanish estate of the de Vegas. Here, with one thrill piling quickly on top of another, the picture ends with the capture of the real murderer, a man of high place in the government service, and with the reuniting of Don Cesar and the girl.

The picture is described as a dashing, romantic melodrama, with magnificent sets and reflecting new photographic glories. Douglas Fairbanks never had a picture with a greater popular appeal than Don Q. Everybody everywhere is bound to enjoy this delightful photoplay.

This novel served as the inspiration for Douglas Fairbanks' photoplay, "Don Q, Son of Zorro". In some cases it was found necessary and desirable in the screen version to depart from the strict following of the narrative in the book.

DON Q'S LOVE STORY

CHAPTER I

THE RIVALS

Two horsemen were riding slowly side by side. On all sides of them stretched the bare and tawny plain, dotted with low hills, beyond which, to the north, the snow-peaks of the Guadarama cut sharply into the blue of the sky.

The two young men had ridden silently for some time, while the thin wind, that, in the words of the Madrilenos proverb, "will spare a candle-flame and blow out your life," stung them as it passed upon its soundless way—soundless, for on that barren tableland, where in centuries long past heavy forests tempered the keen air, hardly a tree remains.

Ahead the road wound away drearily, with its whorls of dust, rising and falling, and its shallow wheel-tracks, to lose itself in a drab plain which mounted up towards the south, until at last it seemed to tinge the deep blue of the upper air with its own tones of tawny haze.

"Bah, it grows cold! Let us push on, Cesar," said the elder of the two young men abruptly.

As he turned his face to look at his companion, the sunset fell full upon it. It was rather long and narrow,

but with a distinct claim to good looks, in spite of the close-set eyes and the slightly indrawn mouth, which told of tenacity and secretiveness.

Without looking round, Cesar de Lutoleale answered at odds:

"By the way has it ever struck you Sebastian, that General de Vayo dislikes me?"

Don Sebastian repressed a faint smile.

"Why should you think so?"

Cesar's blue, handsome eyes flashed up from his reverie with a laugh.

"He is at no pains to hide the fact; and it is rather unnecessary to hate me."

"Do you not mean unaccountable? You popular people are amazed if any single person escapes the net of your fascinations."

"Why do you always twit me with popularity?"

"Because I envy you for it," replied Sebastian promptly. (He was one of those who can give the truth all the value of a lie.)

Cesar's slight gesture was almost impatient.

"No; but seriously?"

"My dear fellow, what can you want that you have not got? You are the Count of Lutoleale and Tarazo! you bear one of the oldest names in Spain."

"It is true I own a name eight hundred years old, and little else, except my sword!" he broke off, with a boyish laugh. "My sword, which I bought yesterday!"

When Don Cesar spoke of eight hundred years, he probably used the words that came first to his tongue; but, as a matter of tradition, a Tarazo was said to have fought beside the King Alfonso of his day, when Tauric the One-eyed sailed across the Straits to found a Moslem Empire in Spain. Since those ancient times, the Lutoleales also had allied

themselves with most of the great families of the Peninsula; and the young hidalgo, with his lithe, square figure and high-featured face, was the last remaining link of a long chain of noble names, warriors, conquerors beyond the seas, and statesmen, whose brilliant lives are written in the story of Spain.

But Fate seems to put a period to all prosperities, whether of a family or a race; and during the last seven generations the once splendid heritage had been handed down from father to son with ever-diminishing boundaries, until Cesar opened his eyes upon a world which endowed him with but a few square miles of desplodado and the old castle of Lutoleale, the narrow windows of which looked out upon long marismas, half prairie, half swamp, to the south, where bustards bred and the wild herds wandered; and to the north upon a rising land of dense forests, above which towered that mighty summit of the sierra, called Sabio Blanco, or the Wise White One.

To this estate a few tenantry still clung with a feudal pertinacity, and eked out a meagre livelihood as charcoal-burners, struggling farmers and game-wardens.

At Lutoleale Cesar had been born and had passed his childhood, while a Carlist war, revolutions and a passionate and foolish monarchy tore his unhappy country. The Lutoleales held to the Crown; and Don Adan, Cesar's father, having lost his wife from an attack of malarial fever, tried to wring a nepenthe for his desolation from action. He mortgaged his estates, flung all he possessed into the Royal treasury, and was killed in a skirmish in Morocco ten years before King Amadeo began his futile, honest endeavour to heal the kingdom's bleeding wounds.

Cesar, an orphan, was left to the care of two old comrades-in-arms of his father's, who, although they

were honourable men, proved in the event but ill stewards of his property; so that when the time came for the youth to be his own master, he found he was master of little else besides. His guardians, however, took him to Madrid, where it was easy to obtain a position in the Royal Household for a Lutoleale.

For years he had been happy enough. There was a singular quality of charm in the strong-spirited lad, who schooled himself to self-control as he attained manhood. His lack of money, a far from uncommon lot among his equals, had given him small cause for regret, until he recognised it as a fatal bar between himself and Dolores de Vayo, the child who, in the early days at Lutoleale, had written her own superscription upon his consciousness, untranslatable as cuneiform to the boy's intelligence, but vividly plain in its meaning to the man.

Dolores, Dolores, with her young, slow smiles and the wonderful mystery of her girlhood about her! That was all he wanted—Dolores! So his thoughts ran; and he checked a short sigh, lest Sebastian should hear it, before he resumed:

"But about De Vayo? I have sometimes fancied that——"

He hesitated, and again the glowing, abstracted look passed across his face.

Sebastian was not slow to perceive its meaning.

"As to his dislike of you, it may be merely the antipathy of the older generation to us of the younger. He is of the old school; his ideals are not the ideals of to-day."

Don Cesar shrugged his shoulders.

"Nevertheless, it is curious that he fastens on me to represent the younger generation whenever it happens to get into hot water. Only yesterday he sent for me about that affair at Borusta's. There were a dozen of us there, and, after all, I know next

to nothing of Borusta; but, of course, in the General's opinion, the whole fault was mine."

"It would appear that he takes a special interest in you," remarked the other drily.

A faint flush coloured Cesar's thin brown cheek. He had no suspicion in his generous soul that Sebastian was leading the talk as he desired and to a well-foreseen end.

"I wish I could think so."

Cesar's voice fell to a key that verged upon emotion. He was not prone to show the world any mood save that of half-mocking laughter, but Sebastian was his closest friend.

"There are wild stories about you, Cesar."

"Why, yes. Are there not wild stories about most of us?"

"But you give a twist to all you do. Stories about other men are stale, for each follows in the groove of the last; but you—there is an originality, or, rather, a kind of freakishness in your character that, I suppose, makes people talk more of you than is good for your reputation."

Cesar was riding carelessly, one hand on his hip; but at this he turned in his saddle with a sudden fierceness.

"My reputation! Who has cast any slur upon that? They may call me whimsical, but my reputation? What do you mean?"

"Nothing. My dear Cesar, you are extraordinarily touchy. It matters very little what gossip says, after all."

"I don't happen to agree with you. What did you mean?"

Don Sebastian snapped his fingers with a sort of exasperated patience.

"I meant exactly what you meant when you called

yourself whimsical. I spoke without choosing my words, no more."

Cesar's eyes still shone blue and keen. But he said nothing further, and presently Don Sebastian resumed:

"In another month it will not be of any particular importance how De Vayo regards you. As soon as the Royal marriage is over, he says he means to retire; and you will find others to back your interests."

"I do not want his good word. I want his good opinion," replied Cesar shortly.

"Why should you care?" repeated the Count of Lucharvo, as if tired of the subject. "When he detaches himself from the Court, he will live a good deal at San Vicente; and, luckily for you, San Vicente is some hundreds of miles away from Madrid."

"San Vicente is close to Lutoleale. I have known De Vayo all my life."

"Even when you go to Lutoleale, you need see very little of him in the future."

"That might be sound comfort, Sebastian, if it did not chance to be the principal aim of my life to see a good deal of him in the future."

"As a neighbour?"

"And also as a father-in-law."

The Count of Lucharvo grew obtrusively grave.

"Ah, that!" he said, as if surprised.

"Why, man, you must have seen it long ago!"

Lucharvo's narrow, dark eyes met his look steadily.

"Perhaps I have been too much preoccupied with my own affairs; and you know you never spoke of it to me. You must remember that you have never even hinted it to me before to-day."

"Naturally. One does not readily stumble into such talk. I imagined that you understood. The thought of Dolores has grown up with me. It is"

—he dropped his voice—"my life!" Then he thrust his feet deep into his stirrups, with a laugh. "Drivelling words they sound, even to me, for all that such have been written in the heart's blood before now."

"And what does General de Vayo say to it?"

"Ah, I have not yet suggested the matter to him."

Don Cesar raised his hand and let it fall with a suggestion of hopelessness.

Don Sebastian rode on, brooding.

"He is a very wealthy man," he remarked absently, after a while.

Don Cesar turned squarely towards him.

"Do you mean to hint——"

"No; of course not. Doña Dolores is beautiful enough to be any man's excuse. Though, for the matter of that, her beauty adds to the misfortune of it. Beauty and wealth. Who could ask for more?"

"Sebastian, are you my friend?"

"I think you know it."

"Are you playing a friend's part now?"

"No," returned Lucharvo, impassively; "I am for the moment playing the world's part. How do you like it?"

Cesar flicked his whip in the air.

"That for the world!" he said. "I am not fool enough to buy the world's approval with my happiness, and——" He stopped.

Sebastian bit his lip suddenly, but when he spoke his tone was cold as before.

"Do you not see that if General de Vayo guesses this, it might account for his dislike? He may have other views."

"No, no! I should have heard of it," said Don Cesar confidently.

"From whom?"

It was a sharply put question, but Don Cesar gazing straight ahead between his horse's ears, did not appear to hear it. Lucharvo's breathing grew hurried. This admission might mean much. Cesar and Dolores were on closer terms than he had believed.

"Speaking as your friend, Cesar, I would advise you to think no more of—of this."

"Spare me the appropriate arguments. I know them all."

"Not quite all. For instance, you do not know that General de Vayo has definitely chosen another man."

"What? who is he?"

"Ah, that I cannot tell you. I have passed my word."

"But how do you come to know? Who told you?" questioned Don Cesar.

"De Vayo himself."

They were now approaching the city. Its mounting streets, its clustered roofs, with their towers and spires, stood up black against the hot crimson of the sunset like a stronghold of dreams.

"So De Vayo told you himself?" repeated Don Cesar. "Since when has he begun to give you his confidence?"

"He knows that I am a friend of yours, Cesar," was the indirect reply. "Perhaps that explains it."

Cesar fell silent, but the Andalusian mare he rode grew restless and irritable under his hand, and from this Sebastian gathered that his blow had reached its mark. For although Don Cesar gave no sign, some nerve must have been wrung in him at the news, subtly altering his touch, till it fretted the tender mouth upon the bridle.

And indeed it was heavy news. For Cesar knew well that marriage with Dolores was hopeless for a poor man like himself. More than once his name had been suggested for high appointments at the Court,

but always to be vetoed on some slight excuse by General de Vayo, the Lord Chamberlain. His popularity and his old name brought many pleasant acknowledgments to the Count of Lutoleale. If he sat as president above the bull-ring, he was cheered to the echo, for he was known to be himself second to none in horsemanship, or in the craft of the sword or as a sportsman. But empty honours rather beggar the purse than fill it; and so young Don Cesar found. For all else De Vayo consistently blocked his path.

Dolores! Dolores! Her name rang in his ears. Yet now some other man had been chosen to be her husband; and in Spain a father's wish was something to be reckoned with. It seemed as though the moment had come when he must prove his love for her in the hardest form of all. Since he could not, as matters stood with him, ask her to be his wife, he felt that he must for her sake sink out of sight. He must no longer seek her favour in the hundred picturesque ways of young love. He must avoid her intimate circle, seem to carry a changed mind, run the desperate risk of being misunderstood and forgotten!

So he pondered as their horses' feet sounded on the bridge of Segovia, and they passed up into the darkening streets of Madrid.

CHAPTER II

WINTER VIOLETS

CESAR had no sooner entered his rooms, which were situated near the palace, than his body-servant, an old man who had been with him in his boyhood at Lutoleale, knocked at the door.

"His Excellency the Lord Chamberlain has been here," he said. "He wished to see you."

"At what hour?"

"At six," said Tobal. "Does the señor Conde desire that I bring flowers?" he added, in a lower tone, as of one who shares a secret.

"Certainly. I must prepare to go to his Excellency's. But make haste, Tobal; I have not much time to spare."

The old man moved stiffly across the room, but paused before he reached the door.

"Violets are the flowers preferred; is it not so, señor Conde?" he asked again.

But even the gentle interest of the old man seemed to Cesar a heavier touch than he could bear on that subject.

"Yes, yes. Begone!" he said irritably.

Tobal understood, perhaps. At any rate, saying that he had left all ready for his master, he went out and closed the door gently behind him. As soon as he was gone, Don Cesar glanced at the clock. It was already twenty minutes to six, and he knew that General de Vayo received the various reports from the officials of the palace at that hour, yet he dressed

slowly; and the great clocks of the city had rung before he stepped into the street, covering his mouth with his cloak, after the fashion of his contrymen, as he passed quickly through the winter darkness to the great iron gates near by, which gave entrance to the patio of the General's house.

He felt that Fate was treating him badly when it sent grim old Arturo to conduct him to a salon, where he was politely begged to wait the Lord Chamberlain's leisure. Incorruptible Arturo, who ushered him into the most magnificent but the least used reception-room in the house, where there seemed never a chance that Dolores might pass through!

For a few minutes he stood in the dimly lit space below the picture of a young woman—Dolores' mother—and looked up with longing at the dark eyes so like those he loved. Then he moved nearer to the door, and stood listening, hoping. But nothing stirred in the great building, save the shutting of some distant window; then a word or two in Arturo's harsh tones, the shuffle of his feet, and all was still. He turned away with a sharp sigh. He had meant this to be the very last stolen interview he would ever permit himself with Dolores, and he felt bitterly defrauded of a happiness which might never be his again.

Well, well, there was nothing for it but to get rid of the flowers. Upon a bow-legged buhl table with its back to the wall, stood a clock of ancient Italian workmanship, priceless, no doubt, but to the young lover it only represented at this moment a convenient hiding-place for the mass of violets which he had destined for a far different lot than this of withering unseen and unaccepted in a gloomy solitude. He took them out from under his cloak, and kissed their fragrance sadly. He was reluctant to part with them, yet he smiled as the picture rose before his mind of himself, ten minutes later, bowing before the austere

eyes of General de Vayo, with the bouquet of violets pressed to his heart! No, no! He dropped them hastily out of sight.

It is difficult to give an adequate idea of Cesar de Lutoleale in those days, when he was at the flower of his age, twenty-five. For it was not only that he was strong and graceful, nor that distinction seemed to crown his handsome head; it was far more. There was a fascination in his often reckless *joie-de-vivre*, in his high-couraged gentleness, with a hint of other and more dangerous possibilities. The whole man was so lovable, with his gallantries, his pride, his ready mockery and his unshaken loyalty.

This is, at least, how he appeared in the eyes that watched him drop the flowers from his hand, and afterwards stand moody and, it almost seemed sorrowful.

"Cesar!" A low, laughing voice, full of the mischief and the delight of youth. "Are you placing a bomb to blow up the house?"

"Dolores!"

Don Cesar took both her hands in his left, covering the slender fingers with his right.

It needed no more than that one word to tell the wild story of his heart. Perhaps Dolores had long guessed the truth, but now she was sure. Yet, woman-like, she only smiled into his eyes and repeated her question, for she could think of nothing else to say with her hands in Cesar's.

He put her a little away from him. "How beautiful you are!" he said, smitten with a sudden sense of her sheer loveliness, her face with its exquisite pallor, and her eyes, her hair, as black as night!

Dolores half averted her face, then slowly drew away her hands.

"Cesar, you looked so guilty."

"I felt heartbroken."

She bent nearer. "Violets?" She buried her face in the blossoms. "You hid them?"

"Yes, I was in despair when Arturo brought me here. I gave up all hope of seeing you," he said.

"But why behind the clock?" she laughed.

"Ah, that was emblematical."

"I am afraid I don't understand."

"It meant that at all times and all seasons I am your devoted servant, Doña Dolores."

"But of course! Are you not the devoted servant of every pretty woman in Madrid?"

Arturo's footstep clooping up the marble stairway hastened the crisis. Don Cesar, still in a tumult at the news he had heard from Lucharvo, believed the last moments of paradise were slipping from him.

"Dolores! You know!" he exclaimed passionately, then checked himself.

"Quick!" The girl stood listening as the footstep approached. "There, sit there!" She pointed to a gilt armchair beside a heavy hanging of brocade.

Cesar obeyed, and almost at once Arturo passed across the great open doors, peering in suspiciously; but he saw nothing save a despondent young man sitting with folded arms.

Nor did he hear the gurgle of girlish laughter from behind the curtain, which followed his departure.

"Arturo spies all day long, but he does not see everything." Dolores moved out a very little way into sight. "Do not rise. Arturo may come back, and he must find you moping as before. I wish, Cesar,"—she sighed a little, but did not look at him as she spoke—"I often wish we were back again in San Vicente. No one interfered with us then!"

"Ah, but you were a child then! Now——"

"Am I not still the same Dolores? Are we no longer friends?" she reproached him.

"Always!" he said fervently. "Always, as long as

you will have me for a friend. But when you marry——”

She clasped her hands.

“Marry? Whom shall we choose? Fat Don Fabrique de Borusta? He is quite rich, Doña Carlotta says. Or your wolf-faced Count of Lucharvo? By the way,”—a little frown drew her dark eyebrows together—“is he also your friend?”

“Not as you are, Dolores; but as men go, he is my friend.”

“Why, why, why?”

She came another step forward in her vehemence.

“He is sincere.”

Dolores pouted.

“I don’t like him,”—she emphasised each word with the violets—“and I don’t want you to like him, either. Promise me!”

“But you hardly know him,” said Don Cesar, in surprise.

“On the contrary, I begin to know him very well indeed. My father invites him often to our house.”

“He is luckier than I. Even to-night General de Vayo will have fault to find with me because I am late for my appointment with him.”

“Why, then, do you allow yourself to be late?”

“Could I have come without the violets?”

Something in his voice touched her; she drew back, and glanced at him with a new, shy look from under her long lashes.

“My father will not know that you were late, for Terrano, the old Duke, is with him. Terrano always stays a long time, which is fortunate, or I could not have come.”

“Dolores!” began Don Cesar, with more ardour than he was at all aware of.

“La, la, la!” she interrupted him. “I only came because I have a question to ask you.” She

nodded her head importantly. "Why do you and my father believe in the Count of Lucharvo?"

Cesar fell back to earth, though, indeed, nothing seemed very clear to him but the fact that perhaps never again should he and Dolores de Vayo speak together intimately, as they were speaking now. Moreover, brought abruptly to give a reason of the faith that was in him as regarded Lucharvo, he felt vaguely aware that he was provided with no satisfactory answer.

"I don't know. But what have you against him?"

He longed to talk of other things, but, in view of his lately made resolves, perhaps Lucharvo was as safe a topic as any they could choose.

"Know against him? Why should I want to know when I can feel? When I can guess his thought as he kisses my hand, when I can hear the real note that underlies all he says? Hush! There! The Duke is going. Con Dios, Cesar!"

Arturo's shoes were growing more audible. Cesar leant back to look up into the girl's eyes.

"I wonder if you will remember that we were comrades? Remember me at all when——"

"Paz!"

She drew back behind the hangings, but a hasty hand flashed out again and scattered a little rain of violets on his upturned face. He caught at the blossoms, but they slipped through his fingers as Arturo entered to conduct him to the presence of the Lord Chamberlain.

He followed in a very downcast frame of mind. That Dolores' flowers should have escaped him seemed like an ill omen. Did the incident foreshadow loss and sorrow to come? The next instant he derided himself, but a lover has too much at stake to make a sincere mock at superstitions.

General de Vayo received him with a distant

manner, which was far from encouraging. He was a tall and dignified old man, with a stiff, military carriage, and wearing his white moustache and whiskers in the older Spanish style.

"Late as usual, Cesar," he remarked, as he seated himself behind his official desk.

"I only received your message, sir, when I came back from my ride. I am sorry if I have caused you any inconvenience."

The General beat a tattoo upon the table with the fingers of his left hand; it was an old habit of his when annoyed. Cesar remembered it well, remembered also the childish insolence with which he had saluted the haughty old Spaniard as "Drum-Major," an insolence severely punished at the time, but never forgiven, for the nickname had clung, and even crept up to Madrid after De Vayo, who still heard it echo in the streets at times of popular disturbance or merry-making.

"You are singularly unfortunate, Cesar, although never by any chance to blame."

The young man remained silent. De Vayo's consistent injustice always galled him. He had never offered him an excuse any more than he would ever offer a protest.

"I wished," resumed the General, "to discuss with you a matter of a very serious nature. You are aware, of course, that the guests who come to attend his Majesty's wedding, as well as the representatives of the various Powers, begin to arrive to-morrow morning?"

"So I have heard, sir."

"Among them will be the Archduke Paul. You know him by repute?"

Don Cesar smiled.

"One cannot avoid it. He keeps rumour busy."

"And for once rumour does not lie. His imperial Highness is difficult. He brings his own suite, but I understand that the less he sees of them the better he is pleased. Hence the onus and responsibility of his entertainment and safety will rest with those gentlemen of the Court who have the honour to be chosen to attend him."

Cesar bowed. He could not imagine how all this concerned him, for, although his birth entitled him to such a position, he was convinced the Lord Chamberlain would oppose any efforts his friends might make on his behalf.

"The Count of Lucharvo is one of the two who are appointed to undertake the duty," went on De Vayo.

"His Majesty could not have made a better choice," said Cesar warmly.

"I agree with you. And you are the second."

"I, sir?" exclaimed Don Cesar, amazed.

The Archduke was the representative of an Emperor; and, if things went well, the issue of the matter might well bring about the fulfillment of all his hopes and his dreams. Surely, also, it meant that De Vayo had for once forgotten his antagonism, and was willing to befriend the son of his old comrade-in-arms, Don Adan.

"I am deeply indebted to you, sir," he began.

But De Vayo brushed aside his gratitude.

"You are in no way indebted to me. I cannot deny that, had the affair been left in my hands, I should have looked elsewhere for the man upon whom to place the burden of upholding our Spanish hospitality with this special guest."

In a country where pride so seals the lips that husband and wife will live apart under one roof for years without exchanging the single word or look which both know could easily put an end to their

estrangement, it is not astonishing that Don Cesar endured in silence. One wonders, if he had asked the reason for the untiring dislike shown him, in what fashion the Lord Chamberlain would have answered. The power of self-deception is an integral part of every human being's mental equipment; and it is fairly certain that not even to himself would General de Vayo have acknowledged that he had permitted the irresponsible words of a child to rankle through the years until his poisoned judgment became warped, in the event, to fatal issues.

"Then to whom do I owe this unexpected honour?"

De Vayo resented the haughty tone.

"To his Majesty himself. You are his nominee. I beg that you will so order your conduct that you give him no cause to regret his kindness. I speak to you without reserve, Cesar, for I would be your friend, and I have known you from a child." He paused for a reply but Cesar made none; and the old man went on, with a grim sneer that belied his words: "It may be that his Majesty is wise, after all. The Archduke and yourself may find interests in common. As to cards, for example, your skill is proverbial."

Don Cesar shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"I fancy you must mean my bad luck, sir," he amended.

"You may be right. I do not greatly heed gossip. I imagine, however, that his Imperial Highness would appreciate a run of bad luck—on his opponent's side. Be prepared to receive him at the railway station to-morrow afternoon. He will remain four days. Until the moment of his departure, Don Sebastian and yourself will be responsible for everything—his enjoyment, his satisfaction and his safety."

CHAPTER III

HOW BUHO CAME INTO MADRID

BEFORE daybreak on the next morning Tobal touched his master's foot in order to waken him.

Cesar roused from the profound sleep, which had only visited him far in the small hours, came to himself with a strange sense of happiness, of some good fortune warm at his heart. Ah, now he recalled it! He had been chosen by the King himself to undertake the delicate duty of keeping the Archduke Paul in good humour with his world. And who could tell what might come of it?

"Señor Conde, it grows late. His Excellency the Count of Lucharvo will be here directly, for it is a long way if you would see the bulls of Zurcanes enter," urged Tobal.

Cesar needed no second reminder. He had arranged to drive with Don Sebastian to watch the arrival of the last batch of fighting-bulls that were to appear in the *fiesta real*, the coronation bullfight. They were advertised to enter the city at dawn, before the busy life of the streets began; and Cesar lost no time, for it is a function never missed by the Spanish *aficionada*. There are many people, indeed, who would rather miss the spectacle of the ring than the driving in of the mighty gladiators to the corral near the arena.

This function has a special name—"encierro"—and the fashion in which it is carried out is the fashion of the Dark Ages, yet typical of a certain

fine, if reckless, conservatism which never seems to die out in the Peninsula. As it is a matter of the first importance that the bulls should arrive fresh and in the best possible condition, the last march from the pastures where they were bred is always a short one. They halt close outside the town or city of their destination; and either during the night or in the hour of daybreak bell-oxen are sent ahead to lead them in. Being trained to follow the bell, the fighting bulls move after them, herded by mounted men with long goads.

All usually goes well until the streets are reached. There the crowd wait to appraise the bulls, to fling challenges at them—men, women and children, who are all ready to risk their bodies rather than miss the excitement of the tramping hoofs, the tossing horns, always flavoured with the possible danger of a sudden wild charge by some irritated beast. Rarely is the entry into any town achieved without more or less serious accidents, which range from the upsetting of a baker's tray to the tragedy of a human life.

Tobal brought chocolate, and Cesar had hardly emptied his cup when he heard Lucharvo's wheels in the street below. The morning air was cold, and the young man wrapped his cloak closely about him as he descended. The drive across Madrid was not a short one, but the two friends were still discussing the qualities of the various celebrated herds that were to be represented in the *fiesta* when they arrived on the outskirts of the crowd.

Here they came upon the owner of the bulls, the Marchese de Zurcanez himself, and also a fat young man, Don Fabrique de Borusta, who greeted them with a warmth that met with scanty response from either.

"You are late, Sebastian. See!"

Zurcanez nodded up the street, where the chattering

people were peeping along the straight causeway, at the end of which a rising cloud of dust heralded the approach of the bulls.

"Let us hurry round to the old cross-road. It is an excellent place," suggested Cesar.

"But rather a nasty one if any of the bulls should bolt," panted Don Fabrique, as he laboured after them on his shorter legs.

But nobody paid him the smallest heed, for as they came to the point of vantage the tame oxen, with their jangling bells, were already in sight, and with them the black fighting-bulls of Zurcanez, which latter, in all probability, had not seen a score of men since the day of their two-year-old trials. For not every bull born upon the marismas is accounted worthy to make a Spanish holiday. There is, indeed, a course of rigorous elimination. At two years old the courage of each animal is put to the test. It is ridden down by men on horseback, armed with goad-like spears, who, by a trick of the wrist, overthrow the bull; and if, having been once overthrown, the youngster refuses to face cold steel a second time, he is incontinently sold to the butcher.

It was of these trials that the three young men were speaking when Don Fabrique followed them into the rutted lane between two ancient walls, where they had taken up their station.

"And you say that not one of your two-year-olds refused?" asked Lucharvo.

"Not one. Most of these that you will see now charged two or three times, especially the one we have named Buho. He is a sulky, unsociable brute, who makes for the man, never for the *capa*. He should show some good sport when the time comes. Why, Cesar, he is an old acquaintance of yours." Zurcanez turned to Lutoleale.

"I have good cause to remember him. He was

up in a moment. I have never seen a *novillo* charge so furiously."

"You will find he has not belied the promise of his youth."

"Long live the black breed of Zurcanez!" shouted the crowd.

A flush mounted to the pale face of the Spaniard. He was prouder of the reputation of his fighting herd than of anything upon earth.

"Viva, viva!" the people yelled to each other, appraising and criticising the animals as they passed. Then some one recognised Zurcanez and Don Cesar, and cheers broke out. Cesar was very well known, for he was one of the last of those nobles of Spain who had not dropped the old custom of riding out to face the fighting-bulls, armed only with a *rejon*, a short, four-foot spear. For the cult of the bull has had in the Peninsula an honourable record, and not until the influx of professionalism was it reduced to its present level.

As the tilt and the tourney of Norman knights degenerated through many grades to the modern prize-fight, so has the bull-ring in Spain fallen from its high estate. There was a period when to be able to face a bull upon equal terms was the boast of every worthy Spanish knight. History tells us of many such conflicts, reaching down from Moorish times to the great occasions of to-day, when a few nobles prove that the prowess of their ancestors yet survives. But as the last century grew older, fewer and fewer grandees were found who cared to risk limb and life in a sport infinitely more dangerous than lion-hunting. Cesar de Lutoleale was one of these few.

Meantime, the deep-chested, straight-backed bulls, thoroughbred as racers, some carrying their fine heads like deer, trooped slowly past. Buho happened

to be the very last; and as the bull-ring was near, the herdsmen began to quicken the pace. The oxen broke into a gallop, and the whole herd surged forward with a noise of bells and cries, clouds of dust, and a frenzied shouting from the onlookers, who approved of the angry swagger of Buho. At the very last moment, just as the great lowering beast came abreast of the lane where Zurcanez and his friends were standing, a spectator flung defiance with a corner of his red-lined cloak across the smouldering eyes.

Buho stopped short, with straightened forelegs, for a second; then, with a muffled bellow, wheeled at right angles, and, crashing through the little group, bounded with lifted tail into the narrow lane.

Within twenty yards he stopped, and turned again to charge. The crowd were scrambling away into safety, except Lucharvo, who had been thrown to the ground with a shock, and, trying to rise, seemed unable to find his feet. He lay on one side of the lane under the blank wall. Buho at once perceived him, and, impelled by an instant decision, leaped as if from a catapult to attack him.

Lucharvo by this time had struggled to his knees, an object of helplessness, such as only an unarmed human being presents when contrasted with the strong ones of the animal world.

"Gallego!" shrieked a water-seller. "He is dead already!"

Women called on the saints, and the crowd, with the insane curiosity of its kind, began to press back to see the catastrophe. But in that last dreadful second Don Cesar sprang to his friend's side. Bull and man seemed to arrive together, yet it must have been that the man was first by some infinitesimal advantage of time. He flicked the bull twice sharply across the eyes with his handkerchief.

Buho swerved slightly in his charge, and, leaving the man on the ground, made for the man on his feet, who drew him away across the lane. The danger of the manœuvre lay in the fact that in this narrow space there was no room to avoid the bull's mad charge. With lowered head, Buho rushed upon his new victim. The spectators held their breath. He must be gored and hurled high in the air, or pinned against the wall. But at the one single instant when such a feat is possible, Don Cesar placed his foot between the horns of the bull and vaulted lightly over his back and out of danger.

Buho whirled on in his blind course, and a roar of applause and delight went up, while Cesar, running back, helped Sebastian to his feet. By this time the herdsmen had ridden into the lane.

"Bravo, Cesar!" cried Zurcanez. "I have never seen a leap between the spears more excellently timed."

"Don Cesar, pray accept my most cordial congratulations," joined in Don Fabrique. "It was a gallant act."

With a gesture of his hand in thanks, and to dispose of the subject, Cesar thrust his arm through Lucharvo's.

"I would suggest returning to breakfast," he said.

All this time Don Sebastian had not spoken a word. He looked pale and shaken, but Fabrique, who made it his trade to observe, saw chagrin beneath the silence.

"A good idea! You will all breakfast with me, señores," said Zurcanez, perforce including Fabrique in the invitation. "But for Cesar, Sebastian, I fear you would have ceased to enjoy breakfasts."

"Cesar needs no words from me," he said with an effort. "As to my forgetting how much I owe him,

that will not be possible, for his exploit will be all over Madrid and in the papers before night."

Zurcanez raised his eyebrows. He remembered that to some men an obligation is like a slow poison; it embitters life. Not so long ago, before his growing intimacy with Cesar had reflected upon him some of the popularity of his friend, many people would have been ready to see in Lucharvo that ungenerous character. Now he was more esteemed, if not more liked; but Zurcanez was at this moment convinced, once for all, that the world's earlier judgment of the man was the true one.

"You will be as popular as Alfonso himself," he said aloud. "Come, drive with me, Cesar! Perhaps, Sebastian, you will be good enough to bring Don Fabrique."

Two minutes later, Fabrique was sitting with entire satisfaction beside his sulky companion. He was a young man, who a few years before had launched himself upon Madrid with a moderately good introduction and a carefully nursed reputation for wealth. With patience and much forbearance he had set himself to gain a footing in society; and as he sat at Lucharvo's side he felt he was in luck's way. From the outset he had fixed upon that unresponsive personage as the man upon whom he must obtain some hold, for he had recognised in Lucharvo a strong and unresting traveller upon the causeway of ambition. Up to the present, however, the Count had held him at arm's length; but Fabrique was supple—he did not despair.

"Don Cesar is one of the fortunate of the earth," he began, after some minutes, as they sped quickly through the sunlit streets. "To him falls always the chance of performing the picturesque act at the picturesque moment." He paused; and, seeing that his companion still looked gloomily ahead, he went

on: "If he had slipped, and you had been the rescuer——"

Involuntarily Lucharvo's face altered, and Fabrique recognised that he had struck upon a likely lead. It occurred to neither of them that in such a case Cesar must certainly have been killed, since Lucharvo had never trained himself to such acts of daring.

"Men like Don Cesar will always gain the plaudits of the crowd," resumed Fabrique, working cunningly on Lucharvo's mood. "And they win more than that—they win the heart of any woman they desire."

Lucharvo frowned. Fabrique's voice was significant. What did he know or guess?

"I have been told that you know more about the world than the world knows about itself," he remarked unpleasantly. "May I inquire what special instance you refer to?"

"I? You are mistaken, Don Sebastian. I may observe more than others, because I am rather an onlooker upon the doings of the world than an actor in them. Ah, I see we are passing the house of the Lord Chamberlain. Is not Doña Dolores the most lovely——"

"Here we are!" exclaimed Lucharvo abruptly, as they drew up at their destination.

"Now I wonder how much he understood of that?" said Fabrique to himself, as he followed Don Sebastian to the breakfast-table.

The meal was a pleasant one, for Don Cesar exerted his powers in order that the gloomy fit that had seized upon his friend might pass unnoticed. But they were not destined to finish it without interruption, for before it was half over an orderly galloped up with the news that the Archduke Paul was expected to arrive within the hour. He had, it appeared, grown weary of waiting in Paris, and, with character-

istic impatience, had precipitately hurried on to Madrid.

The party, therefore hastily broke up. Half-an-hour later Cesar stood on the platform of the Principe Pio station; and his glance fell, for the first time, upon the great frame and moody eyes of that Prince in whose tragedy he was to play so monstrous a part.

CHAPTER IV

LOVE IN A GARDEN

It was the night of the State ball to be given in honour of the King's marriage, and Fabrique de Borusta was finishing his toilet with infinite care before his mirrors. In spite of the fact that his legs were too short, his head too big and that he was already developing an awkward figure, he was far from dissatisfied with the result of his own efforts and those of his valet. He gave a last touch to his upstanding brush of dark hair, examined with approval the set of his coat at the back, and applied another cunning rain of powder to his puffy cheeks.

"I think, Alphonse, that is all I need, eh?"

The Frenchman raised his hands.

"What would monsieur have more? He is already of the most ravishing. Hélas, the poor señoras!"

Fabrique pursed his lips, and smiled knowingly.

"I am a little early, but the night is fine. My cloak, Alphonse. I will walk."

As has been said, the man's chief desire was to hold an established place in society; but, nevertheless, this desire was only partly owing to an inflated vanity; it arose even more from the conviction that a livelihood was to be gained with more ease in that sphere than elsewhere. With this end in view, he studied the weaknesses of those who lived on the level to which he aspired. He had an absolute genius of curiosity, and a further gift which led him

by intuition at the right moment to the right spot. He always contrived to see or to hear just those things people were most sedulous to hide. He discovered that one road to popularity was to pose as a purveyor of gossip, another to submit to become a laughing stock.

His immense forehead and a full, protruding upper lip lent a misleading air of fatuity to his appearance; and as society does not fear the man at whom it laughs, Don Fabrique had been enabled to pick up many of its careless secrets, by some of which he had already begun to profit considerably.

As he walked through the streets he deliberated with himself. Don Cesar was, he acknowledged, the most brilliant young man at the Court, but he had one insurmountable drawback.

Fabrique recognised that he did not in the least comprehend the young Spaniard's nobler cast of thought and springs of action, whereas in Lucharvo he recognised a man of like passions with himself. He had watched Lucharvo taking advantage of his intimacy with Don Cesar in many ways, always accrediting himself at the other's expense, and thus slowly moving towards the political consideration which he desired, although as yet he was only an officer in the Princess's Hussars.

As these thoughts passed through Fabrique's mind, he took his way along a street behind some gardens, one of which belonged to the great house of General de Vayo. The moonlight showed him a door in the wall, and, touching it, he found it yielded under his hand. He slipped softly in to the dark arch on the inner side of the door, and held his breath in terror; for the voice speaking close beside him was that of Don Cesar, and a collision with a man of his temperment was a disaster to be avoided.

"He fell, and a bull happened to see him. I got in the way somehow; but, of course, I was in no real danger for an instant," he was saying.

"Was that really all?"

The soft contralto voice almost made Fabrique betray his presence. This, indeed, was far more than he had suspected, or ever hoped to discover. He thanked whatever gods he believed in for their opportune guidance to this spot.

"Everything."

"Why will you always decry yourself, Cesar? . . . But I have heard the true story. We met Don Alvaro this afternoon; he told Doña Carlotta everything; of Don Sebastian's danger; of how you lured away Buho; and then of your famous 'leap between the spears.' Why did you risk your life for Sebastian?"

"There was no risk. But I could risk my life a hundred times over for this . . . these few minutes you have given me."

Cesar's voice trembled.

"I could not help it. When I thought that you might have been killed . . . I felt that I must see you . . . speak with you . . . I felt sure you were safe," said Dolores.

Fabrique heard the passion in the girl's words. He wondered how far Cesar's self-control would hold, and tried to imagine himself in the same situation. "Dolores, you are crying! Dolores, my darling!"

What followed Fabrique could not tell, for he knew that after this it would be tempting death to remain where he was, in case Don Cesar, alarmed, perhaps, by some mischance, might find him lurking. But it was only terror that drove him away. Yet, had he not discovered enough? He chuckled as he hurried on towards the palace.

The first rapturous moments of love declared can never be recollected, never described. Cesar only knew that he held the woman he had loved so long, and whom he had despaired of, in his arms.

"Do you really, really love me?"

Dolores laughed happily.

"It almost seems so, doesn't it?" she answered, her head upon his shoulder.

"I have so long longed to tell you that I loved you," he whispered, with his lips on the delicate curves of her ear.

"Yet I think you were good enough to suggest a variety of other people . . . Fabrique de Borusta, a horrid little goblin, for instance."

"Darling! . . . Borusta! I never even so much as dreamt of such a hideous possibility! Why should you think it?" exclaimed Cesar.

"Did you not suggest him yesterday evening? Of course you did! And the Count of Lucharvo as well." She drew away from him. "I cannot forgive you for that, Cesar."

Cesar knew but little yet of the convenient feminine memory. Dolores loved him, and he had distressed her in some incomprehensible way.

"But, dear, you misunderstood me. . . I cannot remember . . . Dolores, how could I say anything of the kind, when I love you as I do?"

"I wonder if you do love me!" she exclaimed petulantly.

"I adore you! . . . To think I might never have heard you say those blessed words!"

"You would not give me up, even to the Count of Lucharvo?" she asked him, with a provoking withdrawal.

Cesar was conscious of sudden chill, of feeling a strange revulsion against his friend. He seemed to see him in a new and harsh light. Lucharvo as

a comrade for himself, yes; but as a husband for Dolores . . . inconceivable!

"Do not let us waste our precious moments, Dolores. There is no need for me to answer such a question. You know why I could not speak before . . . I am only a poor man, darling."

"What does that matter?" she asked, her hands upon his shoulders. "You are you!"

"But your father will refuse his consent."

"I think he may . . . at first."

"I cannot give you up! I will not give you up!" The young man held her more closely in his arms. She pushed him gently from her.

"Cesar, I will wait for you," she said, with her radiant eyes on his. "I will wait for you till I am an old . . . old woman!"

After this magnificent declaration, could any man help kissing her?

"But, oh, Cesar!" She put her hand upon his lips, struck by a thought full of a new dismay. "Can you imagine me *thirty* years old?"

"Yes, sweetheart."

"Then I don't think you can love me!"

The inconsequence drove Cesar to laughter.

"Well, perhaps twenty-nine," he amended.

"Cesar! I thought I saw some one move among the shrubs," she whispered in alarm.

"Where?" He thrust her into the shadow, and, moving with quick noiseless steps, searched from end to end among the gloom of the trees. Had Don Fabrique known by how narrow a margin he escaped detection, he might have felt a generous gratitude to his patron saint.

As it was Cesar found nothing, and returned to Dolores.

"Did you see any one?" he asked. "I wish I could have found him."

"How fierce you look!" She clung to his arm. "Cesar, for all your laughter, if I were a man I should not care to quarrel with you."

He slipped his arm round her waist. "My darling!"

She raised her face with a quick earnestness.

"And I love you for it!"

When he spoke again, he drew off his signet-ring.

"Dolores! How I love to say your name! . . . I want you to take my ring. It is too large for your dear fingers"—he tried it on each, kissing them as he made the trial—"but you will keep it; it will be a sign between us, a pledge."

"Always and always! A pledge that I shall never forget you. And in exchange, you must wear my colours to-night."

She pulled a knot of rose ribbon from the laces at her breast and gave it to him.

He kissed both hand and ribbon.

"See, I have fastened it to my sword-knot."

She sighed.

"How soon the time runs away! Hark to the bells. I must go. Doña Carlotta will be looking for me. And your Archduke will be ready to swear at you for keeping him. . . . Con Dios, Cesar." She held him back to look up into his face. "But I shall see you at the ball. . . . You are coming to dance with me?"

The demands of ordinary existence descended in a chill douche upon the young man.

"If the Archduke permits, my darling. But you know that I shall be thinking only of you."

"Oh, but you must come and dance with me, too! Why, to-night, the very first night that we know how we love each other—you must come!" She sang under her breath a sad little waltz refrain. "You must come, Cesar!"

"Dearest, of course, if I can. . . . It is hard to let you go. Adios, dear heart. You are mine always? . . . Say it once more!"

She put her arms upon his shoulders with her old childish action; the moon showed her deep eyes.

"I will love you always; you, Cesar, and no other."
And then she was gone.



Scene from Douglas Fairbanks' Photoplay, "Don Q, Son of Zorro."

Don Q's Love Story.

INTO THE SPANISH FANDANGO HE SWUNG WITH
DASH AND ABANDON.

CHAPTER V

HOW A HEALTH WAS DRUNK IN THE PALACE

DON FABRIQUE looked up at the brilliantly lit façade of the palace. Softened by the moonlight, one saw only the beauty of the splendid pile of building, even the obtrusive chimney-pots seeming to be blotted out of existence by the glamour of the night, while it enhanced the effect of the white stone work about the windows. Full of the information he had just surprised, his tongue ached to the telling of it in the form most calculated to further his own plans.

Upon the great stone staircase within the guests were already crowding, while at every turn and corner stood an *alabadero*, stiff and soldierly, in the brilliant uniform of the Bodyguard, their cocked hats scarcely shadowing their dark, aquiline faces.

Fabrique looked up, doubting whether he also should ascend, but reflection showed him that it was unlikely the chief point of interest which he sought lay in the great apartments above. He passed out again into the courtyard, where the streams of people, looking curiously antlike among the lofty pillars, moved to and fro from lights to shadows. Fabrique hurried through them towards the place where he knew the Archduke Paul to be lodged. Since Don Cesar was better employed, it was probable that Sebastian would be in attendance.

In those days an old castellated house stood upon the edge of the ravine of the Manzanares. It was

scarcely visible from the palace, as it stood somewhat below the level of the Royal gardens, and it was seldom occupied except on occasions like the present, when it sometimes housed a Royal guest. For many reasons it was considered to be peculiarly suited to the Archduke's requirements, but in spite of its lonely position a good deal of rumour about him had already reached the public ear. Madrid was astir for news of him, and Don Fabrique burned to pick up some scrap of special intelligence concerning his eccentricities, or, with luck, some hint of a scandal with which he might regale his inquisitive acquaintances. Before he reached the house he noticed the roar of water, and prowling round the barred and darkened lower windows, he presently heard voices and laughter from above, where a heavy stone balcony was thrust out to overhang the sheer cliff that dropped to the river below. He looked up, then down. The almost waterless Monzanares was for once a river above jest or reproach; it was in high flood, for a freshet from the mountain was tumbling and crashing along its bed.

"A winter storm," he muttered to himself, and strolled round to the main entrance, where, as Fate would have it, he met a young officer of the Body-guard coming out.

"I am in search of the Count of Lucharvo. Do you think it is possible for me to see him?" he inquired, unabashed.

The other man hesitated. He knew that Fabrique was accepted on sufferance by many people, that his gifts had procured for him a certain patronage and latitude, so that his appearance here or there in the social preserves was tacitly permitted.

"He is playing cards with his Imperial Highness in the ante-room. There are some people there. I don't see why you shouldn't go in. That way. Good-evening."

Fabrique found the room at the end of an open passage. It had but a single door and one huge window with fine hangings, which, although closed now, opened upon the stone balcony overlooking the river.

A large table set against the farther wall held wine, syrups, syphons and glasses, and two or three card-tables, interspersed with chairs of the old Spanish type, were scattered about the spacious floor. The beautiful painted ceiling little noticed by the usual frequenters of the apartment, was said to be the work of Tiepolo.

There were only half-a-dozen men in the room, four playing at the card-table in the centre, while a couple of officers of the Bodyguard lounged close by, exchanging low-voiced comments and smiles as they watched the game. Fabrique entered unobtrusively, and began to roll a cigarette, but, glancing at the players, he forgot everything in the interest of staring at them. Don Sebastian, Zurcanez, and a middle-aged man named De Tal—said to be possessed of enormous estates in Cuba—with one other, made up the quartet. It was this fourth personage who absorbed Fabrique so completely.

And, indeed, his Imperial Highness the Archduke Paul is worthy of description. A heavy-limbed and powerful young man of superb physique, but with the lowering, moody, dangerous face of the debauchee. Unluckily for himself, a large grant from the public purse of his native land, backed by a considerable private fortune, enabled him to indulge his appetites without restraint. No man could have owned fewer interests, and those he possessed flourished best by gaslight. Artificial light, in fact, seemed to be the man's natural environment. Those who knew him could never picture him otherwise than seated, heavy

browed, in a circle of light, intent on a game of chance.

Paul had been very much bored by the State functions he had already been obliged to attend and was solacing himself in his customary manner. The contents of a small table at his right hand claimed all the intervals of time that play permitted, and he insisted upon his companions sampling the champagne and liqueur brandy he was drinking all the more frequently when he observed that they did so unwillingly. For the rest, a deep monotone of blasphemy underlaid his whole existence.

"Why . . . should Alfonso get married just when I was starting off on some bear-shooting?" he grumbled, then cast an odd, sudden, questioning glance at the three faces round him; but all were grave and attentive.

"I envy your Imperial Highness," said Zurcanez, as he dealt. "Your country owns the best game preserves left in Europe. . . . This is the last hand, gentlemen."

Paul coned his cards sullenly, and the two young officers behind him smiled at each other. But luck was against the Archduke, and Lucharvo, who had been his partner, came in for something more than plain speaking. At the end of the hand, Zurcanez and De Tal rose from the table, while Lucharvo stood haughtily silent.

"Curse the cards, I say!" repeated Paul. Then, as the men pushed back their chairs, he roared: "What? Going? Hey! Stop! I must have my revenge!"

"I hope your Highness will excuse us; it is growing late," said Zurcanez, with deference.

"Late? Why, we're only beginning the night! Do you Spaniards win a man's money and refuse him his revenge?"

Lucharvo for once longed for the presence of Cesar. What could be detaining him, he wondered with annoyance. But aloud he spoke ceremoniously:

"Your Imperial Highness has forgotten the ball. It is time to prepare for it."

Paul cursed the Royal ball comprehensively; but some dim notion of his diplomatic obligations still moved in his darkening brain. He rose to his feet, and walked not very steadily to the door. There he stood swaying for a moment, and looking back into the room:

"I say, curse the ball! Don Sebastian, give me your arm; I don't know my way about this abominable patio."

As he stumbled out of the room, Zurcanez sat down again and stretched his arms and legs to their full extent with an air of relief.

"Charming man, the Archduke!" he said laughing.

"Very engaging manners," commented De Tal, more gravely. "I must go at once. I have yet to fetch my wife." And, with a bow, he took his leave.

"I say, Marchese, how did you keep your countenance over the bears?" asked Muño, one of the officers.

"By the bye, I *have* heard there is some story about them," replied Zurcanez, looking up.

"What is it? Oh, pray tell me!" Fabrique pressed into notice.

"You, Don Fabrique! By Santiago, yes! or you will lose your prestige as the most reliable gossip in the city," Muño scoffed. "De Kovelovsky was telling us this morning of his Highness's taste for bear-shooting. An immense party goes down to his estates every season, great preparations are made, huntsmen and dogs are gathered, the bears are located—all this is arranged every year; and just as certainly every year on the eve of the hunt, the Prince is laid up with—asthma!" The other men laughed.

"But the guests and the keepers are said to make a good time of it," concluded Muño. "The Prince is likely, I am afraid, to be a handful for Don Cesar and Don Sebastian until the festivities are over."

"I am glad they did not happen to drop on me to look after him," said Zurcanes lazily. "But Cesar keeps him in good humour. Dear Cesar! that is probably why they chose him."

"It is most certainly not why his Majesty fixed on Sebastian," remarked the other guardsman, smiling.

"No, by San Pedro! By the way, did you hear of Cesar saving him from one of my black bulls? I shall never see anything like it again!"

"I'd give a month's pay to have been there!" exclaimed Muño. "I hear his Majesty complimented Cesar." As he spoke Don Sebastian returned, and flung himself into a chair. "Hello! Got rid of his Serenity already?"

"Yes; for the moment he is in the hands of his valets. I wish, for my part, that he were in the hands of the devil! The strain of being civil to the boor exhausts me," said Lucharvo, who was obviously in a vile temper.

"But consider the honour, my dear Sebastian," urged the irrepressible Muño. "The cousin and representative of an emperor! You are envied by all."

"I wish one of you could take my place, then. I'm tired of it."

"But Cesar, he——" began Muño again.

"Oh, Cesar! he has no nerves," interrupted Lucharvo irritably. "Think of it! We are responsible for that savage's good behaviour, Cesar and I; and you saw his condition. He is drunk now—at this hour. We are responsible for his safety, Cesar and I. Suppose he fell out of the window, or down

the stairs, upon whom would the blame he laid? Upon my shoulders and Cesar's."

Zurcanez yawned.

"Where is Cesar?" he asked. Lucharvo's ill-temper bored him.

"Don Fabrique can tell us!" cried Muño vivaciously. "Come, Don Fabrique!"

Don Fabrique's big lip pushed outwards in a fatuous smile. "I can tell you. He is writing a sonnet."

"To the amiable Paul, I make no doubt," suggested Zurcanez.

"No, no; I am quite serious, I assure you," said Fabrique. "It is to the delicate eyebrows of Doña Dolores, the daughter of the Lord Chamberlain."

The Count of Lucharvo sprang to his feet.

"You will do well, señor de Borusta, to remember the custom which rules here," he said angrily.

Fabrique's big face turned pale. It would indeed be a serious misfortune for him to make a social mistake.

"What have I done?"

"It is not permitted to utter the names of ladies in this manner in the ante-rooms of the palace," retorted Lucharvo.

"But if they are betrothed?" expostulated Don Fabrique. He had not meant to go so far as this announcement, but events were driving him.

"What?" Lucharvo's harsh voice held the other silent.

"A fact. I swear it!" But as he spoke Fabrique shrank back before Don Sebastian's attitude.

Muño nodded slightly at Zurcanez. Matters appeared to be moving disagreeably near to a quarrel, which must by all means be averted.

"In any case, we can drink to the health of Don Cesar," he said.

Zurcanez filled his glass.

"Here's health to Cesar, Count of Lutoleale and Tarazo, the best wild comrade, and the finest sword in Spain!"

With a "Viva!" the glasses were emptied, just as Cesar himself pushed open the door and came in. It was a scene that often haunted his memory afterwards: Zurcanez in Court dress, Muño and his friend in the scarlet and white of the Guard, and behind them the darker figure of Lucharvo, in blue. Fabrique, for the moment, he saw not at all.

"Well, friends, to whom do you drink?" he inquired. There was a charm of lightheartedness about Cesar de Lutoleale which few people could resist.

"To you, Don Cesar," Fabrique said, with an air of deep compliment.

"To me? But why this honour?"

"We were about to couple your name with that of Buho," added Zurcanez.

But Don Sebastian would not allow the matter to be passed off thus lightly.

"I wish you had been here a moment earlier," interrupted Lucharvo. "You might have found cause to be angry."

"For what reason?"

"We have just been told the news of your betrothal."

Cesar looked round slowly.

"Of my betrothal?"

Lucharvo watched him with a strange expression.

"Are we to offer you our congratulations?"

"My dear fellow, I wish you might. I fear I have nothing so good to announce. But with whom am I to be angry?"

"Don Fabrique has coupled your name with that of a lady," replied Lucharvo.

Cesar's eyes flashed blue at Fabrique.

"Here!"

Fabrique was rubbing his hands together; the drops

of fear gathered on his bulging forehead. He did not on any account, wish to quarrel with Don Cesar.

"I offer you my apologies, Don Cesar," he stut-tered. "I only—I beg you to understand—pray, be-lieve——"

Cesar continued to look at him with the same re-lentless eyes. "You must learn to speak the truth before you enter the company of gentlemen again, señor de Borusta," he said; then, taking Don Fabrique by the ear, he led him across the room to the door and put him out of it.

"I will not submit to this treatment—I will——"

Fabrique's feeble remonstrances were lost in a roar of laughter from all the men but Lucharvo.

"If you do not like the treatment, you know where to find me," returned Cesar. He came back into the room laughing. It was plain that he was in the highest spirits.

"I have heard the band for the last ten minutes," said Muño. "Come, Juan, we must go."

The two young men took off their swords and laid them on a side-table. They left the room together. Zurcanez also prepared to go, but lingered. The air seemed charged with potential elements of storm. Lucharvo had drunk more than his wont, and the Prince had certainly been on the verge of insulting him. Moreover, Zurcanez had reason to be aware that he was haunted by sore and jealous feelings towards Cesar, especially since the event of the morning.

"Why not come over to the ballroom with me, Sebastian?" he said at last.

"Thanks, Alvaro. But I have been ordered to wait here for the Prince, and Cesar must wait for him also."

"I offer you both my sympathy," said Zurcanez longingly. "We shall meet again later."

CHAPTER VI

HOW DON SEBASTIAN GUARDED THE PRINCE

DON SEBASTIAN DE LUCHARVO stood silent, frowning and cogitating the new and disturbing elements that seemed to have entered unexpectedly into the vista of his future; while Cesar, sitting with one elbow on his knee, was manifestly full of happy thought.

"Why did you not punish that fellow Borusta?" asked Sebastian at length.

Cesar looked up quickly. The impassive level of his friend's voice was changed to a rough note he had never heard in it before.

"Why?" he said. "Because I do not wish to spoil to-night. To-night—glorious to-night!"

Lucharvo's frown grew heavier.

"Then it is true?"

"Amigo mio, do not seem to accuse me. Rather, wish me happiness. It is a secret, but I was coming to tell you of it; you only, for you, being my friend, have a right to know. Wish me happiness, Sebastian."

But the wistfulness that underlay the request did not reach Lucharvo's angry brain.

"Is this the result of our conversation of three days ago?" he asked with a sneer. "What have you to offer her to-night that you had not then?"

"The king spoke to me this morning. It appears that our good Paul has been pleased to say some handsome things of me."

"And did his Majesty forget to mention the fact

that you had saved my life?" broke in Lucharvo, with an odd bitterness.

"I believe he did allude to it," said Cesar. It was obvious poor Sebastian had passed through a rough afternoon with the Archduke. "But you know how stories of that kind become exaggerated."

"Fortune always favours you, Cesar."

"I have hope that she may be about to favour me," said Cesar, his face lightening again. "If luck came my way, even General de Vayo might be won over."

"And on that chance you spoke to—her?"

"Yes. I don't excuse myself, Sebastian. But don't spoil to-night with misgivings of the future. Wish me happiness."

"My dear Cesar," said Lucharvo coldly, "I wish you all the happiness—you deserve!"

The noise of a party of people approaching prevented further talk. General de Vayo, followed by the customary suite appropriate to his errand, came in, and the group of blazing uniforms produced a picture of life and colour to which the stately old apartment lent its enhancing frame.

"Gentlemen, I understood I should find his Imperial Highness the Archduke Paul here?"

"He is in his rooms, sir, preparing to attend the ball. With your permission, I will go and inquire if he is ready," said Sebastian, with equal ceremony.

"I will accompany you," answered the Lord Chamberlain. "Meantime, in case we should in any way miss his Imperial Highness, you, Don Cesar, will be good enough to remain here."

In a moment or two the room was empty again, and Cesar, left to himself, plunged at once, lover-like, into a blissful reverie. How long or short was the interval which passed he never knew until a very slight sound at the door behind him brought him to his feet. But it was not the Prince; in fact, all that Don Cesar

caught a glimpse of was a brush of dark hair over a bulging brow.

"Señor de Borusta, a word with you!" he called out, as he gained the door.

Don Fabrique was in the act of making off, but the Count of Lutoleale was not a young man lightly to be denied. He came back, therefore, assuming to the best of his ability an air of offended reserve.

"Pardon! I thought no one was here," he said. "And I am in a hurry. You will excuse me?" He turned to go.

"By no means—until we have had a little necessary speech together. May I—insist upon your telling me where you heard the extraordinary piece of intelligence concerning me which you have been good enough to spread abroad this evening?"

Fabrique cast about in his mind what to say, but his processes of thought were clogged by the terror with which Don Cesar filled him. He was in the grip of that quality of inexorableness which underlay the character of the young Count.

"Some one mentioned it in my hearing," he answered at last.

"Ah! Some one mentioned it in your hearing? Now, I wonder who that was?"

The mockery in Don Cesar's voice brought no sort of illusion or comfort to Fabrique. He realised that he was standing face to face with a deadly moment. How much Cesar suspected he could not conjecture, and that perilous person was waiting for his reply.

"Upon my word, I cannot tell you!" he blurted out; and, indeed, this was true enough, for Fabrique knew of no power on earth that could have lent him sufficient courage to confess to Cesar his presence in that enchanted garden an hour before. Cesar considered. He meant to challenge Fabrique, but not yet. Delay was expedient, so that those who had heard

Borusta's words to-night might never connect the two events. Dolores' name must not enter into a quarrel with a person of this kind.

"Attend very carefully to me, Señor de Borusta," he said. "It will be well to attend very carefully indeed. You and I share a secret—a secret, you understand?"

Fabrique intimated by a choking noise that he did understand, and wiped his forehead.

"Good! If ever by any inadvertent word of yours it should cease to be a secret, you"—Don Cesar drew his sword and touched the fat man's breast with the hilt—"will cease to be a man."

"Cease to be a man?" repeated Fabrique helplessly.

"Yes. For you will have become"—Cesar flourished his sword, ending with its point to the ceiling, and he laughed a little as he spoke—"you will have become—an angel. A little heavy on the wings perhaps."

Fabrique fell back, and never had human voice sounded sweeter in his ears than did the Archduke Paul's at that instant. The Prince made a fine figure in his resplendent equipments, his breast covered with orders, as he faced General de Vayo, who, with Lucharvo and the remainder of his following, accompanied him. Fabrique obliterated himself behind the curtains in the deep embrasure of the window.

"Curse these State functions!" began Paul, in his deep bass. "Time enough, General—time enough! I detest nothing so much as hurry!" He looked about him, chose the most easy-looking chair, and sank down into it with a leisurely sigh. "I am thirsty. Here!" He beckoned to one of the Royal servants standing near the door. "Champagne! Count of Lucharvo, you are gloomy; drink with me. General, your health!" Then putting down the tall glass, he

added, "Why do you remain standing? Pray seat yourself."

"It is already late, your Highness; we wait to escort you," said de Vayo.

"Then I beg you to wait no longer. I have changed my mind. I remain here. Perhaps, if you will return at midnight, I may feel more inclined for festivities."

The white-haired old man bowed with great dignity.

"As your Highness wishes. Sebastian, I would speak with you."

Paul watched them troop slowly out, then drank a second bumper to the perdition of all mankind, in his usual vein. As he did so, his eye fell upon Cesar, who stood at his left hand. He turned and, leaning on the arm of his chair, fastened his brooding gaze upon him.

"Your world goes well with you, Don Cesar," he said. "You look happy. Now, I have never yet discovered any rational ground for happiness in this beastliest of all beastly worlds!"

Cesar smiled.

"A man never finds happiness, your Highness. Happiness always finds him."

The Prince considered this in tipsy gravity until Lucharvo entered. The Count's dark uniform and sombre expression chafed his overspent nerves.

"Here is a man with the blue devils, if you like!" he remarked roughly. "Are you in love, Blue Devil?"

Don Sebastian started. This was beyond endurance. But Cesar intervened, and for the time saved the situation.

"Why, yes, your Highness; of course he is in love! We all are. We owe it to the ladies."

The Prince wagged an indulgent head at him.

"As for you, I don't doubt they have all set their hearts upon you, especially the lady of the rose ribbon, whose love-knot you wear. I dismiss you. Go join

them; they will be grateful to me for sending them their favourite."

Cesar flushed.

"But, your Highness will permit me to wait for you," he urged, for it was a hardship that Sebastian should be left alone with the Prince in this humour.

"No, I say; no! Do you hear? No! The Count of Lucharvo shall stay and give me my revenge." The Prince hoisted himself up with some difficulty and moved to the card-table. "Come, sir. Now, go, Don Cesar."

He watched the young man as he turned slowly to the door.

"Don Cesar!" he called.

"Your Highness?"

"If you can dance with your sword on, you are more surefooted than most of us!" laughed the Prince.

Cesar responded, then, unbuckling his sword without removing the knot, he laid it on a side-table amongst several others, while Sebastian, who was stripping the covers from fresh packs of cards, watched him obliquely.

"I will return shortly, Sebastian," he said in a low voice, and went out.

"Now, Don Sebastian, what do you say to *écarté*? Here are fresh packs and a fair brand of liqueur; what more can we desire? Come, the luck lies between you and me. I lost on account of your bad fortune, or bad play, this evening. Let us see how the cards treat us now. Deal, man, deal!" The Prince watched Lucharvo's hands over the edge of his tumbler. "Now!"

It would be tedious to enter into the particulars of the game. The luck had certainly turned, and Don Sebastian won almost continuously. The Archduke as continuously drank, and forced his companion to drink

also, while his temper grew more savage with every loss.

Lucharvo, excited far beyond his wont, forgot all caution and expediency. The stakes had been doubled and redoubled, and as the clock boomed the half-hour, Lucharvo laid the king of diamonds on the table.

"The king of trumps! I win again!" And he laughed aloud.

The Prince stared stupidly at the card, then he flung down those which remained in his hand.

"I play no more with you and such as you!"

The insulting intention of the words fired Lucharvo.

"May I ask what your Highness means?"

The Prince laid his heavy arm across the table. He was a seasoned drinker, but his eyes showed that his self-control had slipped away from him. He fixed his stare on Sebastian's blue uniform.

"I mean that you are a blue devil, and have the blue devil's luck," he said, with the malevolent humour of the drunken.

"Is that all?" sneered Lucharvo. "Your Highness is a bad loser!"

Paul glowered for a moment as he searched in his dulled mind for some insult to thrust at his companion.

"Yes, when losing becomes monotonous," he answered. "I always win from Don Cesar; but then, he is that which I suspect you, Count of Lucharvo, are not."

Somehow the groping, evil mind had penetrated to the core of his companion's jealous feeling.

"What may that be?"

"Lucky in love, unlucky in cards. He *is* lucky in love, eh?" He prolonged the last word, thrusting out his under jaw with a malicious leer.

Don Sebastian set his teeth, but kept silent. Yet

the small alteration in his face was not lost upon the blood shot eyes across the table.

"As I suspected! He has cut you out! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

The Prince's triumphant guffaw goaded Sebastian to words.

"Have a care what you say! Even you shall not dare."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" The Prince pushed against the table; the glasses leaped and jingled. "Cesar has cut you out? Eh? She prefers Cesar! She has excellent taste, Don Sebastian! Ha, ha, ha! What, not even a kiss for you? Ha, ha, ha!"

Lucharvo sprang to his feet.

"By heaven! If you say another word——"

"It's true! By all the saints, it's true! But Cesar—she caresses Cesar!" He flung one great arm above his head, and again guffawed. "And not a kiss for you, poor Blue Devil!" He shook his head in affected pity.

Don Sebastian seized the first sword that came to his hand. It happened to be Cesar's.

"Not even from you will I take this!" he cried.

But the Prince was still chuckling drunkenly over his joke.

"She loves Cesar, eh?"

"You lie!"

"Lie, you mongrel! I'll kill you for that!" Paul raised himself with difficulty, and, picking up his own sword, which he had unbuckled and laid upon the floor at his side when he began to play, he tried to steady himself to the fencer's attitude. "Guard, confound you! Guard!"

Sebastian met him, the swords engaged, and then, at the first pass, the Spaniard's sword slipped between the jewelled orders and plunged into the Prince's body. For a second or two the splendid form stood upright,

then the sword clashed to the ground, and the Archduke, swaying forward, fell upon his face. His legs moved weakly, he rolled over on his back and lay quite still.

Sebastian recovered his sword, and sprang back out of reach.

"Come! Let us finish it," he snarled.

But the Prince lay as he had fallen, his eyes half closed. Sebastian stooped over him.

"Dead drunk," he muttered bitterly; then all at once the strange pallor of the face struck him sober. He knelt down hurriedly beside the great out-stretched man and touched his hand. It was chill. He could feel no breath upon his lips; he pushed aside the jewelled orders—a little dark stain was spreading upon the white cloth of the tunic! Dead! With an involuntary movement he leaped to his feet, and shrank away from the body, then stood bent forward gazing upon it, transfixed with the horror that was slowly settling to clearness in his brain.

"Dead!" he muttered to himself. "Dead!" But the knowledge that he—he, Sebastian of Lucharvo, had killed the King's guest hung chaotic in his thoughts; not even to himself could he formulate the words which held that awful meaning.

And behind his back, from between the brocaded curtains, Fabrique stole out. He cast one flying, panic-stricken look at the two motionless shapes under the high chandelier, and fled noiselessly, leaving the door ajar as he ran. But Don Sebastian did not hear him; his senses were in a whirl through which nothing pierced but the heavy white face of the man he had slain.

"The guest of the King!" Then a madness of fear fell upon him. "How shall I hide him?"

He became possessed of the idea. To hide the body, to put off, even for an instant, the inevitable discovery!

He looked around. The spacious room was slightly furnished. Behind the curtains perhaps. He started violently; some one was coming! *What* must he do? How save himself?

The footsteps approached swiftly down the marble corridor. There was not a moment to lose! Then, almost before he knew it, he found himself crouching behind the door, with the sword, Cesar's sword—he recognised it in this frantic interval—in his hand. The door opened inwards. He knew now what he was going to do! And he must prove an alibi. He snatched up the Archduke's cigarette-case from the table. He had a use to which he could put it later.

The rapid footsteps came on. It was Cesar singing a love-song under his breath. A love-song! While he, Sebastian, held this knowledge tearing at his heart! All the bitterness of his jealousies fused in a flash to hate. He was glad to do that which he was about to do.

Don Cesar pushed back the door, not seeing any one behind it, and as he did so, Sebastian lunged forward and stabbed at him. Cesar heard something, and attempted to spring aside. He saved his life probably, but only in part avoided the blow. The blade passed through the flesh of his shoulder, the hilt struck him behind the neck, hurling him forward into the room. Before he could recover himself, Sebastian, flinging down the sword, leaped out through the door, closing it behind him. Then he staggered against the wall and pressed his head into his arm to collect his thoughts. So far he had acted by instinct, but now that he was out of the room his wits returned. Ah, that and that he must carry through! He stood listening. Shielded as he had been by the door, he was sure that Cesar had not seen him, that he could have no least idea of the identity of his assailant.

He stood listening. He heard Cesar's cry:

"He is dead! The Prince is dead!"

Don Sebastian flung up his head with a gesture of triumph. After all, Fortune, the fickle, had deserted Cesar! Now the game was in his own hands!

He rushed along the corridor towards the palace.

CHAPTER VII

THE ROSE-COLOURED SWORD-KNOT

CESAR, thrust headlong into the room, could not recover himself for some paces. He had half turned his head in an effort to see his assailant, when his foot touched something. He looked down sharply. Prince Paul lay on his back, the light pouring into his half-closed eyes.

With a dreadful misgiving, Cesar bent closer over the heavy face, bloodless now, and fast settling into the calm and rigid beauty of death. One arm was flung outwards from the body, and on the broad breast some hand had pushed the jewelled orders aside from the blotch soaking his white tunic. His sword slanted with the hilt upon his knee, as it had fallen from his dying grasp; and all about, the disorder of the overturned tables, broken glasses and scattered cards wet with wine, spread palpable, shocking under the glare of the chandelier.

Cesar knelt hastily and laid his fingers on the up-turned throat—no pulse of life beat. He snatched at the sword, and held its blade before the pale lips, but no breath dimmed its shining. He was conscious that these actions were useless—foolish even, weak attempt to fend off the remorseless fact of death.

He forgot himself, his own wound, the strange attack that had just been made upon him, in the horror of finding this man, whose safety had been committed to his charge, flung far out of his keeping beyond the barriers of life itself.

He laid back the sword as he had found it, and rose stiffly to his feet.

"My God! how did it happen?"

Unconsciously he spoke aloud. Then he deserted conjecture for action. . . . In the first place the Lord Chamberlain must be summoned at once; and Cesar bethought himself that he had seen Fabrique de Borusta in the open corridor without. He hurried to the door, intending to call Fabrique; as he moved he became conscious of his own wound, and clapped his hand to his shoulder, bringing it away stained with blood. What could be the meaning of the attack made upon himself? Well, that must be all thought out afterwards.

The door was stiff. He wrenched at it with his right hand, for the left was almost powerless from the effect of his wound. Steps and voices were approaching. Cesar shouted to them to open the door.

A strong hand flung it back, and General de Vayo strode in. Cesar met him.

"He is dead, sir! The Prince is dead!"

De Vayo made no reply, but brushed past to stand over the fallen figure on the floor. His own suite, with that of the Archduke, and a crowd of inquisitive and excited people, drawn after them by the rumour of the Prince's death, hung upon his heels.

"Make way, gentlemen; please make way!" said a short man, pushing through the press.

People recognised him, and fell back to allow the King's physician to pass. He made a rapid examination, and looked gravely at de Vayo.

"Dead!"

A stifled sound like the sigh of a wind rose from the crowd.

"Dead!" de Vayo repeated in a voice that brought home to every one present a full sense of the disaster. "Don Cesar, what have you to say?"

"I only returned a few moments ago, sir. I found him dead."

"You found him dead?" De Vayo's bushy eyebrows projected like a penthouse over his angry eyes. You *found* him, you say?"

"Yes, sir, lying there as you see him."

De Vayo gave him a steady look.

"Not much more than ten minutes ago I left you here with him alone," he said with marked distinctness. "We had hardly reached the palace when I was recalled."

The sinister meaning of the tone could no longer escape Cesar's notice. He glanced at de Vayo in surprise.

"Certainly you did, sir; but his Highness dismissed me almost immediately."

"Do you wish me to understand that you left him here alone?"

"No sir."

"Then who remained with him?"

At the words Sebastian stepped forward.

"I did, sir. I remained with his Highness when he dismissed Don Cesar."

The words dropped somewhat harshly from his thin lips.

"You? . . ." said de Vayo in some surprise, "And then what followed?"

"We played cards."

"Continue."

"Presently his Highness missed his cigarette-case. I offered to fetch it, and left the room for the purpose."

"You returned?"

"Yes, sir."

"And when you returned?" the stern questions came rapidly. "Pray tell us what you saw then." Sebastian set his teeth.

"Through the door ajar I saw the Prince lying."

He pointed a dramatic finger, and the crowd shrank a little, "And a man with a drawn sword in his hand was stooping over him."

In the strained hush of the moment men hardly breathed.

"Who was that man?"

"I could not tell. His back was towards me. I could not see his face."

"I understand your willingness, Don Sebastian. But you are bound in honour to speak now. No tie of friendship is strong enough to keep you silent when the guest of the King, the guest of Spain, lies dead by violence! . . . In the name of the King, who was that man?"

"Sir, when I saw his Highness there, I scarcely noticed more, but ran to call you, knowing you must be still close at hand."

De Vayo spoke again in the ominous silence.

"You are a man of honour, Count Sebastian, but in this case your words need some confirmation. You went for his Highness's cigarette-case and have not since that moment entered this room. Where is the case?"

Sebastian opened his hand and showed the golden case with the Archduke's initials. De Vayo fixed his eyes upon Cesar, but before he could speak Sebastian stepped forward.

"There is one thing more I wish to say, sir," said he, "it is this. It is inconceivable that Don Cesar could have been guilty of such a crime. There is some terrible mistake. . . ."

But de Vayo interrupted him. "I understand, Sebastian. I know Don Cesar has long been your closest friend, but no words of yours can help him now. I must ask you to be silent. The conduct of this matter rests with me."

On the words a slight clatter and hubbub broke

out near the door. Don Fabrique, keeping, as his custom was, well behind backs, had trodden upon a sword. He picked it up; there was blood on the blade! With an involuntary exclamation he dropped it, and thus drew attention upon himself.

"The sword! The sword!" called out a voice.
 "The sword has been found!"

De Vayo, standing tall and erect, looked across the heads.

"Who found it? I request the gentleman to bring it here."

Twenty hands seemed to pluck Fabrique forward, while he hung back, and would have thrust the sword into the grasp of any one of the men who flanked him on either side. But the death by violence of a Royal personage was an affair with which it was no one's desire to be even in so remote a degree associated. Thus Fabrique found himself, panic-stricken, wilting under de Vayo's wrathful gaze. Cesar sprang forward. "Here is a witness for me! Señor de Borusta, as I returned to this room a moment ago, I met you in the corridor?"

Fabrique's eyes shifted. "I certainly did not see you," he answered pointedly.

"What do you know of this matter?" de Vayo demanded.

"Know of it?" stuttered Fabrique in his high voice. "Nothing, nothing, Excellency; I swear it! I stepped on the sword, that is all!" He held it out deprecatingly.

De Vayo took it from his hand, and raised it up by the hilt so that every person present might see it. From the hilt dangled a little knot of rose-coloured ribbon.

"To whom does this sword belong?"

Cesar's arm fell to his side. Dolores' love-knot!
 "It is mine," he said.

De Vayo's great eyebrows jerked once spasmodically.

"How can you account for this blood upon the blade?"

"When the Prince dismissed me with permission to attend the ball for an hour, I laid my sword upon the side-table. Is not that true, Don Sebastian?" Cesar's tone rang on the question.

Sebastian stepped back involuntarily as his friend turned to face him, but the same movement revealed Cesar's wounded shoulder. General de Vayo pointed to it.

"It is for me to question. You are wounded. How did you come by that wound?"

"I will tell you. Before I reached the palace it occurred to me that I ought to return, lest Don Sebastian should find it difficult to entertain his Highness." His blue eyes seemed to pierce Sebastian. "As I entered the room, a man concealed behind the door sprang out and stabbed me."

"Ah! And who was your assailant?"

"I did not see him."

"But he had attacked and wounded you?"

The scornful question could not fail to affect public opinion against Cesar, and he felt it.

"I was attacked from behind. The man stabbed me. The blow drove me half across the room, and before I could look round he was gone, banging the door after him."

A silence fell, as though de Vayo desired to give each man time to weigh Cesar's defence and to find it wanting. At length he spoke.

"A lame story, Don Cesar, and one that will not benefit you. Why add denial to the rest? I cannot seriously consider such an explanation as you have offered me. Of my own knowledge you were here alone with his Highness, and this is the issue! Yet

you endeavour to exculpate yourself by an incredible tale of a mysterious assailant, who uses your own sword to wound yourself! You cannot tell us who he was, nor how he happened to be here. You moreover declare that the Archduke had given you permission to absent yourself, but when, after all this, you appeal to two gentlemen, one of whom is notoriously your closest friend, for support to your story, they cannot give it. Have you anything more to say?"

Cesar reflected for a moment. What could he say? The forces of circumstance were combined against him—what could he do? Nothing—for the moment, nothing!

"I can only repeat that I am absolutely innocent of the Archduke's death," he said quietly.

"I am sorry that I cannot accept your defence," returned de Vayo; then, with rising indignation, he shook his hand over the dead man. "Look, Don Cesar, at your work! The safeguarding of his Highness was committed to your care. How have you kept your charge? You are threefold convicted! You were alone with him, with your sword he was slain—your wound testifies against you." De Vayo ceased; then turned to those who had collected in the room.

"Gentlemen, will you be good enough to leave us?" General de Vayo looked round upon the circle. "There are some few words which I would wish to say to Don Cesar alone."

Slowly the groups filtered from the room, some to spread the news, some to inform the civil authorities, some to make arrangements for the removal of the Prince's body; all alike discussing the event, except Don Sebastian, whose gloomy abstraction drew comments of respect and sympathy as he hurried away.

"This is a most unfortunate business," remarked

one diplomat to another, as they entered a waiting carriage.

"Not in all its aspects," laughed the other, "although, of course, we shall never acknowledge it. There is one person who will feel perhaps even grateful to Don Cesar and his sword."

"What?" with an answering laugh. "The Emperor? To be rid of an incubus?"

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, yes, although I was thinking of some one who would be more grateful still."

"Who? His next of kin?"

"No . . . his wife!"

They laughed together as the speaker pulled up the window of the *coupé* on the windy side. And out in the half-light of the Campo Sebastian hurried moodily along towards the palace, dogged by a bulky shadow.

As the room emptied, de Vayo began to pace up and down, and presently the door closed upon the last of the onlookers, and even the sound of their voices died away. From time to time he glanced at Don Cesar, who stood square-shouldered and rigid under the pitiless light, his haughty face bleached, but betraying no other sign of feeling. The Lord Chamberlain watched him with a hardening conviction of his guilt. How much his judgment was influenced at this crisis by his old resentful dislike of the young man he did not then in the least conceive, but Cesar understood; he knew that his case was prejudged, gone by default.

"Don Cesar," de Vayo halted before him, "have you nothing to say to me now that we are alone? . . . I was your father's friend."

"But never mine!"

The bitterness of the rejoinder startled General de Vayo. "Why should you think——"

But Cesar waited for no more.

"Because you can believe me to be guilty of killing this man who was helplessly——" He broke off.

"Well, you saw him."

"It is impossible, in the face of the evidence, to believe you innocent."

"Then is there any more to be said?"

De Vayo's anger flamed up again.

"It would have been better—wiser, to have acknowledged your—crime," he answered harshly; "to have told me of any palliation—a quarrel, wine, hot words. But you, you deny everything! Do you understand what you have done? Do you realise that you have committed a crime which brings upon Spain such a shame as she has never known . . . that a Royal guest should die by a Spanish sword? You are forever disgraced! It is my duty to have you arrested, and the end you can foresee. But for the honour of the caste to which you belong, and of the old name you bear, I intend to give you the only opportunity which remains open to you to escape the last penalty of the law." He paused. "There is your sword," he flung it with a clash among the broken glass.

Cesar stood erect, unresponsive, as if blind and dumb.

"I will go out of that door. I will leave you time to reflect, and—to act. Perhaps your sword may be used for the only purpose for which it should ever be used again."

De Vayo waited a little, then walked slowly to the door and passed out. For a long time Cesar stood motionless, then his self-restraint fell from him, he looked wildly round the room.

"It can't be! It can't be!" he cried.

He sank into a chair, one hand clenched upon his knee, the other arm contracted by the pain of his

wound, and sat staring straight before him with eyes that saw only the fatality which had befallen.

To have lost everything—love, honour, everything—he reflected, with pathetic bewilderment. After all, Death *was* the only way out! A minute or two longer, and then—welcome darkness!

CHAPTER VIII

TRUE LOVE

WITH some vague desire to taste again the free air of heaven, Cesar flung back the heavy curtains from the window, threw open the casement, and leant out upon the stone balcony. The bitter breeze from the mountains blew over him, carrying, mingled with the loud, unfamiliar voice of the flood, a strain of distant music, the very song Dolores loved to sing.

He stood drawing in long breaths of the cold wind, and then turned back into the room. The shame of a public execution was not to be faced by one of his name; no help remained but in the sword which de Vayo had flung at his feet.

But as he emerged from the shadow of the embrasure, he stopped abruptly. For Dolores stood there under the centre lights by the side of the dead man. Some one had thrown a military cloak over the body, from head to heel, hiding the ghastly face from view. But Dolores' features were fixed in a stare of horror, for she knew that the long, rigid form could mean only death.

"How did you come here, Dolores?"

She started violently, and looked over at him. He noticed that her hands clenched together upon her fan appeared like a cross against her breast.

"What is this?" she asked in a strained voice.

"How did you come here?" he repeated. "How could they allow you to come?"

She made a slight nervous gesture with her hand.

"My father left me. I was waiting for him outside, and I heard people talking. . . . I was afraid that you—Cesar——" Her voice failed. "I would have dared anything, faced anything to know if you were safe."

To hear her say that now—now, when all love must be over between them for ever! Still he spoke quietly.

"You see I *am* safe, my darling. But you must go at once; they will be coming soon for this."

She looked at him strangely as he pointed to the dark bulk on the ground between them. Then she turned obediently and walked to the door. He did not trust himself to look after her, for to feel her go was the first pang of death.

He waited till he thought she must have reached her carriage at the outer gate, then, stepping through the havoc of glass and cards and wine, he raised his sword. Awkwardly, because of his wound, he loosed the knot of rose ribbon from his hilt, held it long to his lips, then slipped it into his breast.

His next action could not be mistaken. He touched the point of the blade to his throat to make sure of the following thrust. There was a cry, and between the sword and his body Dolores was clinging.

"What is this you meant to do?" she sobbed.

He stood back a pace or two.

"If you loved me, you would let me die," he said.

"Why should you die?" she cried.

A little painful shrug of the shoulders.

"It is hardly worth while to tell you why. You will hear of what they accuse me, soon enough."

"But I know, I know it already!" she answered. "I heard the people talk as they streamed past the carriage. They say you—you fought his Highness——" She shuddered.



Scene from Douglas Fairbanks' Photoplay, "Don Q, Son of 'Lorro."

DON CESAR HOLDS THE INN'S HABITUÉS AT BAY.

Don Q's Love Story.

"Yes, while he was too drunk to stand or to defend himself. A reputable crime to be committed by the man you love, Dolores!"

But his bitter words only made the call upon her tenderness the stronger. The revelation of her great love deepened in her eyes.

"You cannot trust me at this moment, Cesar, but I can trust you!"

His self-restraint was shaken.

"Don't, dear heart! Don't say you trust me!" he almost entreated. "It makes it all the harder to——" He paused.

But by this time Dolores had recovered her self-possession, and could face the situation as it stood.

"There must be some way by which you can prove—you can surely prove your innocence?"

Cesar shook his head.

"I can't see it," he said simply.

"Yet it must exist," she repeated. "Cesar, think!"

"No; the evidence is too strong. Why, even Fabrique de Borusta, who met me in the corridor as I returned here, denies having seen me."

"Yet the guilty man must be found in time. He must confess," she urged.

"In the meanwhile, I shall be arrested. You can see all that must follow upon that. A court-martial, with its terrible chain of evidence, an inevitable conviction, a deep ignominy of death. And those few who will say that I—I, Cesar de Lutoleale, when I had the opportunity, had not the courage to die and escape it all."

"No, no!"

"But yes, love. My darling, you are wonderful. If ever a man owed more than his life to a woman, that I owe to you. Yet think of what lies before me. Would it not be wiser to end my life here and now?"

"No!" The conviction in the word roused him. "No! For if you die now, you almost acknowledge your guilt. Don't you see that by dying, you will play the game of the guilty man? Once you are gone, who will take your part? Who will work and seek out the proofs of your innocence? Why, for that alone, you must live. If not for my sake, for that! No other human being can do what you will do. I believe in you, Cesar. Live, and force others to believe in you also!"

Her deep, burning, splendid eyes called to his heart.

"All you say is true. And if I might gain time, perhaps—but that is not possible. I have but a few minutes given me by your father's favour. Darling, if I could live to justify your glorious faith in me, can you doubt what I should do?"

"Live!"

"Yes."

"Then escape, Cesar. See, the door is open!"

"But there is no outlet except through the guarded gates. No, dear love; no, we must part." He drew her towards the door. "Good-bye, my darling! No man on earth had ever so true a love!"

He kissed her, and in the silence of that long kiss a voice from the outer world seemed suddenly to call to him.

She stirred anxiously in his arms, conscious of some new thought which moved him.

"What is it, Cesar; what is it?"

"There may be one slight chance left. Ask me no more about it, darling. If—if Fate is kind, you shall hear from me, somehow, at some time. Go! They must not find you here."

"Then promise you will not do—what—what I prevented."

"I promise," said Cesar.

Through all the agony of her mind she realised that she must leave him. She clung to him with broken words.

"I am yours—yours, whatever happens. God keep you, Cesar!"

During the slow moments that followed he turned back into the room, and, picking up his sword, stood waiting. At the first sound in the corridor he drew himself upright. Wounded and spent as he was, he must give no sign of suffering.

De Vayo flung open the door, and gazed at Cesar's figure with an unrelenting stare.

"So you have failed to make use of the advantage I gave you," he said. "I see that my consideration has been thrown away upon you. That I should live to see the son of Adan de Lutoleale court shame!"

As he spoke, he advanced towards Cesar, and a hundred eager eyes collected behind him. Slowly, the whole end of the great apartment filled, and de Vayo waited, as if desirous that as many as possible should be witnesses of the young man's disgrace.

"Guards, arrest this man!"

But Cesar, with a haughty movement, stopped them.

"You wish to speak?" demanded de Vayo.

"Yes."

"To confess?"

"No! But to protest against a false accusation and against your injustice, General de Vayo. Also, I break my sword before you, which, although it has been used by an unknown hand for a vile purpose, was never stained in mine!"

De Vayo looked on as, under Cesar's foot, the steel bent and snapped. A sigh swept like a breeze over the gathering.

"Well, your last chance is gone, Don Cesar," said

the old man scornfully. "To other qualities that degrade a man, you add those of a coward!"

"A coward! No! From that charge at the least I can absolve myself!"

For an instant, Cesar's eyes, blue and intense, glowed from one inquisitive, peering face to another in the wide circle round him.

"In what manner?"

De Vayo's question held a sneer.

"In this!"

With a stride, Cesar sprang out upon the balcony. For an instant he leaned forward and looked down into the furious deluge, tearing and gulping through the gloomy ravine so far below him. The moon was clouded, and he could see nothing but a moving darkness.

"Gentlemen, good-night!" he cried, and leaped.

There was a rush to the embrasure.

"He's gone! He has leaped into the torrent!"

But de Vayo was already giving orders to have the banks watched and searched.

"Too late, sir," said one of the onlookers. "No man could leap and live."

"Ay, it was to certain death. The flood will beat his life out," Zurcanez pushed his way to the front.

"No coward's leap, that!"

"No, no, no!" echoed back and forth among the throng.

"General de Vayo!" exclaimed Zurcanez in a strong voice.

De Vayo's thin hand shook as he made a gesture in answer to the appeal.

"Gentlemen, I withdraw my words," he said. "Whatever Don Cesar may have done, he has not died the death of a coward!"

CHAPTER IX

THE OUTCAST

CESAR's first sensation was of cold, an intense cold, which wrapped his body, his arm, his head, but it hardly seemed to matter—nothing mattered; he was tired—tired—tired, and he neither knew nor cared where he was nor remembered anything. It was the roar of the river which sounded its monstrous symphony in his brain, but he imagined that he was at Lutoleale, camped in a storm among the forests upon Sabio Blanco, that a pine-tree had fallen and held his legs, imprisoned. He moved his fingers feebly, yet in his dreams his efforts to rise were superhuman.

Next he was aware of a dreadful lapping of water about his ears, every now and then a sluice of icy drops stung him to torment, and he battled to open his eyes to throw off the nightmare which oppressed him. It was long before he gathered sufficient strength to understand that this was no nightmare, but the beginning of his new life—the bleak life of an outlawed man.

He recalled, as a sleeper half recalls a dream, his leap and the hurtling of the flood as it caught him in its swirl; after that nothing more until the first grey of dawn, when he came slowly to the knowledge that he lay wedged between a rock and an ill-smelling mass of wreckage, where he had been stranded by the subsidence of the water. He was battered and bruised from head to foot, and a core of torment throbbed in his wounded shoulder; above all, a strange weakness overwhelmed him.

Yet some instinct urged him to creep away to hide; but it was only after many struggles that he was able to free himself, and presently to reach the shelter of a bush which overhung the main bank of the river-bed.

There he lay, panting, and asking only to die where no eye could see him. It needed an impulse from without to rouse his will, to rekindle the purpose made in the despairing moment before he leapt. Die and leave his name for ever at the world's mercy? No!

A distant sound set his heart beating. He leaned from his refuge of leafless, hanging boughs, and discerned far-off flashes of light, too low for any star, manifestly the lanterns of men moving on the margin of the river. The search for him was already afoot, and with an unfamiliar, horrible sense of alarm, he cast about in his mind what he must do to find a safer hiding-place.

With difficulty he climbed out upon the upper level of the bank, and saw above him, jagged against the sky, the top of a broken wall. It might suffice to shield him from the sight of those below. He made towards it painfully, but even when he reached it his labour was not over, for the little hut, ruinous and roofless, was choked with a growth of brambles and half-dead weeds. Through these he forced his way until he could crouch, spent and fainting, under the riverward wall.

By this time voices could be heard, and later even words carried plainly.

"Did you ever see him?"

"See the poor señor Conde? Yes, only last Sunday, when he saved the Count of Lucharvo from Buho. You heard about that? Yes. Ah, there you have a fine sportsman lost in Don Cesar."

A shout from the river interrupted the talk.

"Holà! Holà!" followed by an excited shrieking

of women's voices. "We have found his coat here in the mud! Come quickly!"

"Coming," cried one of the men. "We shall find his body lower down, without doubt. Pobrecito!"

Don Cesar had found a little crack in the wall, and, looking through, saw a pair of Civil Guards (men belonging to one of the finest police forces the world has ever seen) running along above flood-mark towards the direction from which the women had called. But he could see no more till two other men appeared below. He watched them also stooping and seeking; now one would give a little cry, and the other would hurry to join him. This second pair were River Guards, belted across the breast; they also worked thoroughly and from scraps of their talk the listener gathered that the strictest search had been ordered.

Troubled and feverish, he tossed restlessly upon the harsh stems and fallen leaves, the confusion of delirium mounting to his brain as the day broadened. How could he escape detection, wounded and bruised, clad in the tell-tale remnants of his Court dress? By noon consciousness had left him, and he lay muttering, oblivious indeed of specific danger, but anguished by a vague distress of mind.

So the day wore through. By the evening the wind shifted a point and blew in cold upon him. Then thought returned; he was parched with thirst, and he knew that whatever the risk he must get down to the water and drink his fill. But even then he controlled himself, meaning to wait till darkness fell. The ripple of the river maddened him as he lay, and he rose on his elbow to peer through the chink, feeling as if the very sight of the water would relieve his stiffened tongue. Never had night darkened over so slowly.

What was that noise? Through the dusk came the crash of pebbles and a stifled moaning. Peering down,

Cesar saw on the strip of beach above the backwater where he had found himself lying at dawn, a feeble figure tottering to and fro, stooping and murmuring, with a lantern swinging its faint shaft of light from stone to stone.

"Señor Conde, Senor Conde!" And again: "Cesarito! My little Cesarito! I pray to thee, San Cristobal, let me find him! Ah!"

The face of the old man gleamed for a moment in the soft radiance, and Cesar never forgot the look upon it as he stooped to pick up some object from the water.

"It is his handkerchief. I can feel the cross and sword embroidered upon it. Cesarito, where are you?" Tobal moaned.

Don Cesar struggled to his knees. Poor old Tobal! He was nearer to the answer of his prayer than he imagined. A stone flung from above rolled down the bank to the old man's feet. Half-startled, he examined it; while he did so another stone rolled after the first. Some one on the higher level had thrown them. Panting with agitated hope, Tobal scrambled up the bank, and, halting to listen, heard his name called softly.

Who can describe with what heart-broken tenderness the old servant found and tended his master? A dreamy sense of protection stole over Cesar as he heard the long-disused caressing terms of his childhood on Tobal's lips; none other had ever lavished them on the motherless boy at Lutoleale. Water softened his dry tongue, his wound was dressed and eased, and the old man's own cloak wrapped gently about his body, till at length the dream of safety drowsed upon his tired brain, and he slept.

With morning's first light Tobal brought him milk.

"Where am I, Tobal?"

"The Señor Conde remembers?" inquired the old man gently.

"Yes, yes. Can you get me away from here?"

"I think to-night, Excellency. A couple of hundred yards farther down the river is the Cañada de las Viudas."

"I know it."

Cesar recalled the dozen of small houses scattered in a hollow by the river, which he had often noticed in his rides, and which gave shelter to a little community known as "The Widows," who gained a living by washing the garments of the city-dwellers in the stream.

"My daughter-in-law Nita, the widow of my poor Juan, has her house there," continued Tobal; "and presently I will go to see her. I will tell her nothing, for she is but a woman, and a talker like the rest. She will believe that I came to look for my lord's——"

"For my dead body?" added Cesar, with a dreary laugh. "Well, it is lucky for me that you did come."

"But I found you—found you living; not as I feared!" exclaimed the old man exultantly. "Yet before her I will seem to mourn. I will even offer to remain in her house while she goes to visit her mother in Madrid. So, señor Conde, I shall feign to be overstricken with sorrow, and she will go to her mother for many days, that I may have time to conquer my grief here in loneliness, for she knows that I am a lonely man."

"And after?" asked Cesar fretfully. "She will return, and what then? I cannot think! My thoughts confuse me!"

"Why should the master think when he has his servant to think for him?" returned Tobal soothingly.

"To-night I will take you down to Nita's house, though it is a poor one for the señor Conde."

"Go on with your plan. What does the house matter?"

"The señor Conde is young and healthy, and in a

very little time strength will return to him, and I have heard that Robledo, Nita's son, who is already of the contrabandistas in Andalucia, has made a journey hither to see me, his old grandfather."

"And I can get gack to the sierra with him? That is good, Tobal; a very good plan—unless they catch me on the road!"

"The señor Conde can trust Robledo. He is only a young lad, but of much resource; and he is of my blood."

"A good breed," said Cesar. "Take your cloak and go."

With a hundred distressed apologies Tobal transferred the manta from his master's feverish limbs to his own shoulders.

"If I should appear without my cloak, Nita would be curious, and there is no fathoming what a woman will guess. She must suspect nothing, and in the afternoon she will start for the city. I myself will return as soon as darkness falls, and none can see me enter here. I have left a pitcher with milk which I stole beside the señor."

"You are very good, Tobal. I shall need nothing more, and no one is likely to visit me until you come back to-night. Go in peace."

Another weary day of pain and danger lay before Cesar, but he faced the prospect with fortitude, and also something of hope, for now he possessed some forlorn chance of escape, whereas a few hours ago the best he could have looked for in his wounded state was to die there undiscovered among the rank decay of weeds and briars.

About midday he was dozing uneasily, when the chill of a shadow falling across his face startled him broad awake. A handsome lad of about sixteen stood silently looking down on him with black, unfathomable eyes.

"This is our pitcher," he said at last, with the soft, Andalucian accent.

"Also the milk it holds," rejoined Cesar, hardly knowing yet how to handle the situation upon which, alas! his life depended.

"True, for the little goat was dry this morning."

"I offer you my apologies," said Cesar, with his grand air. "I was thirsty."

The boy's deep eyes showed the passing of a sudden agitating thought.

"You are wounded?" he stammered.

Don Cesar understood. The lad guessed who he was, and the moment was come to venture all.

"I am, at least, sick and poor," he corrected. "I have nothing left to me but my life, and if you tell any one that you have seen me here, I shall lose that also."

"I shall never tell."

Cesar fancied he read something stronger than any oath in the black eyes.

"Are you faithful?" he asked.

"Always."

Neither man nor boy foresaw how this claim was to be proved in the far-off years which were to come.

"Well, I will trust you." Cesar closed his eyes in sheer weakness.

"I am named Robledo," said the lad softly, and before Cesar could look again he was gone.

After nightfall, Tobal and his grandson carried Cesar down to the cottage, where in hiding he made a slow discovery. Lying in the dark, close atmosphere he would imagine the miles and miles of waste-lands over which vulture and bustard opened their broad wings, solitary spots far from cities and the dwelling-places of men.

He imagined the deep and almost untrodden forests which offered harbourage to such as he. He sickened

for the free wind that rushed down the steep sides of Sabio Blanco and roared about the crumbling old Castle of Lutoleale. Once in the woodlands, he would find safety for a time until he could escape from Spain and until some message reached him from Dolores. For his heart was set on letting her know, in spite of all risks, that he still lived. He would save her the sorrow of believing in his death; that she could ever be brought to believe in his guilt he never for a moment imagined.

Meanwhile the days passed, till, at length, one evening, Robledo, returning from the city, brought the news that his mother was impatient to be at home again.

"The master is not fit to travel, and there is much danger on the road," objected Tobal anxiously. "Besides, I must send him with thee, Robledo, and thou art but a child. Moreover, thou hast spent thy life in the mountain village of San Pedro. What can such a one know of the world?"

"I have crossed the sierra with the smugglers these three years past," returned the lad, with his characteristic gentleness of speech.

"It is not now a question of a paltry bale of goods," cried the old man severely, "but to guide the master in safety to the forests of Sabio Blanco. If he comes to harm thou shalt answer to me for it, Robledo!"

"He shall come to no harm while I live," said the boy.

"If you were but a man! If I could but go with Don Cesar!" bewailed Tobal. "That were, indeed, something to rely on. Do you suppose that to travel so many leagues without a *cedula* will be as easy as tossing off a glass of liqueur at a gulp? And the master has no *cedula*."

A *cedula* is the official paper of identification without which no man may travel twenty-four miles from his home on the highroads of Spain.

"But the nights are dark, grandfather," suggested the lad.

"Moreover, you must lead the master by way of the waste-lands. Alas! it is certain that he will be often hungry and thirsty before you reach the sierra; yet a man can make shift to pull his belt tighter if he be hungry; also he can leave off singing if his lips be dry. But if you meet with the Civil Guards, and you have not your papers in order, no excuse will serve. They will march you to the nearest gaol. . . . And there also, Robledo, thou must follow the master."

Robledo hesitated.

"If it be necessary," he said at last.

"What? Art thou a traitor? Thou wilt not follow the master to the gaol?" asked Tobal furiously.

"Not if I can better help him from the outside," deprecated the lad.

Tobal shook his white head.

"For well or ill I must chance it! But I would that thou wert a man grown, Robledo!"

And it was not without many tears and a hundred miserable forebodings that Tobal parted from his master and Robledo that same night, and stood listening to their footsteps as they died away in the gloom of the valley.

CHAPTER X

THE BURIAL OF DON CESAR

Two days after Tobal walked slowly along the dusty road towards the city in the teeth of a cutting wind, a pathetic figure, old and weary and obviously dispirited. The parting from Cesar seemed to have heaped a weight of age upon him, for his beloved master was also his foster son, and dearer far than any child of his own begetting. Should he ever see him again, or hear the gay and gallant voice which for more than a score of years had made the music of his life?

He shook his head despondently as the question crossed his mind. He had begun to realise during the past days that Tobal Velez, the hereditary servitor of the Lutoleale, was grown age-stricken and useless, too feeble to follow the changed fortunes of the house to peril and outlawry, and doubted that any man living could give to his master the unsleeping care which he himself would have bestowed.

The single palliation of his wretchedness was the knowledge that he had been charged with a message which none but he could deliver.

The road ended in a rising bridge, and Tobal stopped to look down at the river. The Manzanares had long ago subsided to its normal flow, a mere trickle of water, fantastically emphasised by the immense bridges that span it. Madrid delights to make a mock of her river with proverbs and derisive phrases, yet like all streams which run between walls of rock the Manzanares displays whims and vagaries, and from time to

time rises to vindicate its true nature of a torrent in a thirsty land.

Perhaps Tobal's thoughts followed something upon these lines while he lingered on the bridge. The wind tossed his cloak from about his neck, so that a Civil Guard riding past recognised him and pulled his horse on its haunches.

"Are you not the señor Cristobal Velez?" he inquired politely.

"Yes," replied Tobal, with pride, "a servant of the house of Lutoleale."

The Civil Guard possessed the compassionate heart of a Spaniard. He bent from his saddle and spoke kindly.

"They have just found the señor Conde," he said.

Tobal staggered back with a cry, an awful greyness overspreading his face.

"Found him?"

"Ay, so we think; but it's difficult to be quite certain—he has been so long in the water. . . . You understand?"

Tobal covered his eyes with his hand to hide his relief.

"Where was he found, señor?" he asked, after a minute.

"Ten miles below there, half-buried in the mud carried down by the flood that night. You will do me the favour to accompany me, señor Velez, that you may see the body, for they say that you will know, if any one can know now, if it be his."

Tobal grasped the situation. He must affect to recognise the nameless corpse; it would increase a hundredfold Don Cesar's chances of escape, for afterwards all search and pursuit would naturally cease.

"Yes," he replied; "I shall know if it be indeed his body."

There is no need to tell at length how skilfully the

old man carried through the make-believe business of the next hour. His doubts, his fears, his hopes, his ultimate sorrowful recognition of the poor remains, and his entreaties to be allowed to take them away for burial in the last resting-place of the Lutoleales. In the end, even this boon was conceded, and the name of Don Cesar was set among the dead of his race.

In the midst of his arrangements for the burial, Tobal found time for more than one attempt to carry out the commission given him by his master, and which, to say the truth, he had undertaken against his will. But it was in vain that he had repeated to Don Cesar the proverb, "Two persons to a secret are two too many," and pointed out its exceptional truth. No; Dolores must be told all—Cesar's trust in her love was absolute. He did not dare to write to her, but he insisted on sending her a message.

Charged with this, Tobal crept round to the tall gates of General de Vayo's Madrid house day by day, and asked to see the señorita. For the love of the saints would she condescend to speak with him a moment?

But he could gain no admittance, nor even an answer from Dolores herself. She was reported to be out, or resting, or entertaining guests—always some impersonal reply to his entreaty. Then the old man tried to see her in the streets, to intercept her as she drove to the afternoon winter promenade in Las Delicias de Isabel Segundo, but he never once chanced to catch a glimpse of her graceful dark head.

There was another daily caller at General de Vayo's who, however, was always admitted, and whose first anxious question was always the same:

"How is she?"

"Alas! Sebastian, my friend, she recognises none of us yet," the General would reply. "She wanders painfully in delirium. The murder of the Archduke

has had a sad effect upon her. It was a horrible shock to the nerves, you understand."

Count Sebastian's dark face grew darker.

"Does she connect Cesar with the affair?" he ventured to inquire one day.

The General frowned.

"Naturally."

"Has she been told of his—death?"

"Not yet . . . no! We will tell her later, when she recovers . . . if ever she recovers from this dreadful fever. . . . It was an infamous affair that of the Prince, but it may yet lead to your happiness, Sebastian, as it has thrust Cesar from your path."

Sebastian looked strangely across the table.

"Dolores speaks of him. She has taken his disgrace to heart?"

The General shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"What would you have? They were boy and girl together."

And in the meantime, Dolores lay in a shaded room where the quiet was broken only by her piteous voice as she called on Cesar's name, or implored her father to save him. For weeks she hovered between life and death, and by the time she was able to take her old place in the world, the happenings of that tragic night had become ancient history.

By chance some gossip reached Tobal that Doña Dolores was ill. As a matter of fact, she was just then supposed to be on the point of death, but for many reasons General de Vayo forbade any mention of her state. On hearing the rumour, Tobal hurried once more to the de Vayo's gateway. If the report was true, it would explain her silence—everything. The pretended Cesar was already resting in his grave; but far away in some remote mountain solitude the real Cesar was waiting, hungering for a few words in answer to his message.

Spurred to resolve by his former failures, the old man rang at the bell. Some one from within called out the formula:

"Quien es?"

Tobal returned the customary reply, and begged that the señorita might be told that old Tobal prayed to see her, even for a little moment.

The porter within continued to speak through the spyhole of the gate, and now at last Tobal could not any longer doubt that he had been instructed to make the excuses he offered so glibly. But with the changed, worn face of Don Cesar before his mind's eye, the old fellow would not take refusal. He insisted that he must see the señorita, he urged the man to go to her and bring back even two words from herself.

At last the porter seemed to yield; his footsteps echoed across the *patio*. For a long while Tobal waited patiently in the bitter wind, until the gate was opened by a rough hand and old Arturo emerged, clanging it behind him.

"Come with me, Don Tobal," he said, irritably. "We will talk in some more private place."

The two cloaked figures hobbled on side by side until they reached a quiet lane, where, sheltered from the wind and the noise of traffic, Arturo turned on his companion.

"Do you not understand that it is unseemly for you to trouble the house of my master, the Lord Chamberlain, by your pertinacious inquiries?" he demanded.

"I wish to see the Doña Dolores," replied Tobal firmly.

"It is not seemly," repeated Arturo with rancour, "that one such as you should annoy the señorita."

"Surely I do not annoy her."

"Yes, of a certainty, seeing that you come from a house of shame—a house of disgrace."

"There has been no disgrace, but treachery, old

man of an evil tongue!" exclaimed Tobal hotly; then caught himself up. "I would know if the señorita be really ill?"

"Ill? No! Do you dream she grieves for your young Count? I tell you no! On the contrary, she is about to make a marriage of the noblest conditions."

Tobal considered. He did not believe Arturo, who notoriously bore the reputation he had just given him, but he desired to gain some real information, and he temporised.

"I have carried the señorita many times in my arms when she was a child, and I am an old man, Don Arturo, whose heart is broken, and I do not think she would refuse to see me if she knew that a word from her would comfort me," he pleaded.

"There you flatter yourself unadvisedly," said grim Arturo, "for she says that she is weary of your importunity, but she will not bid them refuse you at the gate, for she is of a tender heart."

"Will you swear that this is the truth?" asked Tobal, after a long pause.

He could hardly bring himself to believe this of the young girl Don Cesar loved and whom he himself had thought almost worthy of his idol.

Arturo shrugged his shoulders.

"Is it not manifestly the truth?" he retorted. "Have you not many times harassed us of the household at the gate? If she had wished to see you, why has she denied you?"

Poor old Tobal had no answer to give, for mutual accusations would not further the affair he had at heart. Then he made his last appeal.

"You have the honour of seeing the señorita every day," he said, "will you not do me a great favour, and tell her that I am in truth ill and failing, that this my sorrow has been too heavy for me to bear?"

Beg her to see me for one little, little moment before I die."

"I can promise nothing, yet if I have a chance I may speak for you," replied Arturo, as he wrapped his cloak round his spare body and departed.

Tobal's was no false plea, for he had become despairingly conscious that his strength was failing. Perhaps it was the chill of the night when he had taken the thick cloak from his own shoulders to wrap about his young lord's; perhaps it was the long anxiety, the constant alarms of the ensuing weeks, joined to the grief which perpetually fretted him, that sapped the old man's strength; but whatever the cause he felt himself growing weaker, and yet he had not accomplished his mission, and he knew that if he were gone Don Cesar, from the nature of the case, would never employ another messenger. As long as he could keep on his feet he haunted the street in which Dolores lived, at the hours when he was likely to see her pass.

But she never passed; he never gained so much as a glance by which he might judge whether she were changed, as Arturo had declared, or whether, as he believed in his own thoughts, she still loved Don Cesar. One look would have been enough, he told himself, for by one look he could read her; and even if he might not gain speech with her, he would yet have some news to send to the sierra.

But it was not to be. There came a day when, for the last time, he dragged himself through the streets to take his usual stand, and from there was carried home helpless and almost dumb. The daughter-in-law from the Valley of the Widows, came to attend upon him for the few days he lingered.

Heaven knows what accusations the faithful soul brought against himself during those closing hours—that he should have forced his way to the señorita's presence—that he should have written to her—any

means by which he might have gained from her the one vital word to send to Don Cesar.

He left two or three newspapers, which gave in detail the finding of the body of the late Count, his own recognition of it, and the burial among the Lutoleale. These were to be sent by a sure hand to his grandson Robledo, together with a small scrap of writing, which deeply interested his daughter-in-law, all the more as she could make no sense of it. There were but a few sentences, yet on them turned the course of more than one life.

CHAPTER XI

THE FRIENDSHIP OF DON FABRIQUE

ON the same day, the keen wind of Madrid having for the moment lost its edge, Dolores de Vayo drove out for the first time after her long illness. At the corner of the street by which you turn towards the Prado, a crowd was volubly disintegrating; twos and threes still lingered, relighting their cigarettes; a little group had stopped to drink glasses of water from the cool earthen jars of the water-seller sitting near at hand under her ragged umbrella.

A stout duenna, like a full-bosomed pigeon, who accompanied Dolores, leant forward in a ruffle of excitement.

"It has been an accident—or it may be an apoplexy!" she exclaimed. "Ah, we have missed it by a moment! See, they are carrying some one away!"

She pointed to a knot of people just disappearing at the end of the street.

Dolores turned her languid eyes towards the figures whose awkward movements showed that they carried a burden among them.

"Poor creature!" she said listlessly. "I am glad we did not see him!"

If she had only known, if she could only have foreseen how much that moment too late was to cost her! For it was Tobal who had fallen paralysed at his post while, for the last time, he watched to see her pass. A moment sooner, and she must have recognised him, and much of the tragedy of Don

Cesar's life—tragedies both of choice and chance—might have been averted.

But as it was not to be, mercifully she knew nothing of the intangible line Fate had at that instant ruled between her and happiness. She drove on, tranquil with the tranquillity of a slow convalescence, quite indifferent to all the world, as she had been ever since she had heard that Cesar was dead.

"Do not let us go to the Prado," she said presently.

Doña Carlotta uttered the little shriek with which she always greeted any departure from the conventional.

"But what would you have? Can we endure to drive without seeing a living soul? Dolores, my dearest girl, we shall die of *ennui* if we cease to meet our acquaintances. Have we not already been shut up for weeks? Weeks? For months, years, centuries!"

"Very well. It does not matter."

"Ah, but yes, it matters so greatly. See the carriages—the streets are full!"

Doña Carlotta was beginning to enjoy herself.

"Now you will be enlivened by the smiles of your friends. I shall behold with joy the colour return to your pale lips."

A tall, rather gaunt man, walking at a leisurely pace, passed them; his narrow eyes met Doña Carlotta's flash of recognition with meaning.

"There is Don Sebastian! Will you not give him a look, Dolores?"

But Dolores had turned away her head. Her white teeth met on her under-lip and a pang of remembrance and misery shook her. Why should this man, whom she loathed, walk abroad in health and honour, while Cesar, brave and generous Cesar, lay dead and shamed in the burial-place of the Lutoleales?

Don Sebastian, after walking a few yards, turned to follow the carriage. Events, he felt, had befriended

him beyond the limit of imagination. Cesar dead, nothing now stood between him and the woman he loved but a regret. And he smiled as he told himself that the dead, whatsoever place they may have held in life, are soon forgotten.

The smile still lingered as he came up with the carriage, which was now pacing slowly among the thickening press of vehicles. Doña Carlotta appeared to have eyes in the back of her head, for she made him a slight sign to approach. He sprang forward, his hand was already on the carriage-door, but before he could speak, Dolores lay back with closed eyes against her supporting pillows.

"I am tired, Doña Carlotta. Pray drive home."

A dreadful pallor had overspread the girl's face, and the duenna, in a frenzy of terror, and with nothing short of Dolores' immediate dissolution before her mind, implored Don Sebastian's aid with tears, and wildly called upon the coachman to turn at once and drive home at full speed, in spite of the obvious impossibility of any such proceeding. Sebastian helped to disengage them from the crowded traffic, and, as the coachman whipped up his horses, he stood for an instant beside the carriage-door.

"I will at once find Dr. Posada, and send him to the house."

"But he is an angel, this Don Sebastian," cried Doña Carlotta. "How thoughtful! How clever! He is, moreover, of a noble air, and handsome to distraction. Dolores, he is devoted to you. You are feeling worse now, my child? Ah! Pitiful Lady of Sorrows, keep her alive until we reach the house!"

Dolores opened her eyes.

"There is nothing to alarm you. The noise wearied me, that is all."

Don Sebastian hurried upon his errand with entire complacency. Dolores had not spoken a single word

to him; but, on the other hand, he had not failed to perceive that his appearance had in some way agitated her. During these last anxious weeks he had taken occasion to enlighten General de Vayo as to his hopes, and they had been heard in a manner which from a man of the General's stamp, might be accepted as cordial approval. He was congratulating himself upon the thought that the first sight of him had not found her indifferent. His heart throbbed more lightly; it was now only a matter of time.

"Don Sebastian, pray wait a moment!" said a husky voice behind him.

Sebastian started, and his face darkened.

"Pardon me, Don Fabrique, I cannot stay."

"But I must have a word with you," insisted Don Fabrique, ranging up alongside.

"Another time." Sebastian put out an impatient hand. "I am in search of the doctor for a friend."

"Yes, yes. I saw all, and I followed you," returned Fabrique, puffing on unabashed. "I will accompany you, and afterwards we can talk."

Don Sebastian submitted, and Fabrique grinned to himself with a base man's savour of power. The fact of the other's submission was significant.

To make things clear it will be necessary to go back to the day which succeeded the death of the Archduke Paul. Don Sebastian had been busy since the early morning in giving his evidence, in being interviewed by the various persons who were officially concerned with the unhappy affair. He had undergone a frightful ordeal while he repeated over and over again his carefully prepared story, with nerves on the rack. Late in the afternoon he returned through the chilly streets to his home, and was met by his servant with the news that a gentleman was waiting for him.

"I cannot see any one to-night. Make my excuses to the señor," he said.

"Will my lord Count condescend to see the card of the gentleman?" urged the man nervously, yet greedy of the guerdon of certain notes judiciously exhibited by the visitor.

"Don Fabrique!" Sebastian read the name with surprise and annoyance. "That this fellow should dare to disturb me at such a time! Make my apologies to the Señor de Borusta——" he began contemptuously.

The door behind him rattled under an uncertain hand. Fabrique de Borusta's fat jowls showed in the dimness paste-white with trepidation.

"I beg you to forgive my intrusion, but my business is a matter of importance."

"To-morrow I shall be delighted to place myself at your service," returned Sebastian, with a scowl that belied his words.

But although Fabrique flinched, he did not give way. He had worked himself up to this encounter, and he would not willingly face another twenty hours of qualms and panic like the last. An unbitted horse was dangerous, yet force the bit between its teeth, and one became its master—with such reflections he conjured up his courage. The first move was hazardous, but it must be made, and afterwards he would compel this ill-conditioned grandee of Spain to serve his pleasure and his convenience as he might desire.

"To-morrow will be too late!" he blurted.

His cowardice was a tangible fact, yet there was a set intention in his aspect which arrested Don Sebastian. He temporised.

"Too late?"

"Exactly, for I shall be forced to apply in another quarter."

Sebastian dismissed his servant, and led the way into the big, bare sitting-room, with its litter of papers and books in comfortable proximity to the stove. He

fulfilled his duties as host with perfunctory completeness, then professed himself ready to give his best attention to Don Fabrique.

That gentleman drew his chair closer, till he sat knee to knee with Don Sebastian; then, rubbing his hands nervously down his stout legs, he leant forward and met the glare of the other's eyes before he spoke.

"You know, and—I know," he said, very slowly; "but no one else need ever know."

A whirl of blood mounted to Sebastian's brain, but he held his gaze steady.

"Know what?"

Fabrique threw himself back in his chair, with both arms flung abroad.

"Oh, it was a master-thrust!" he exclaimed admiringly.

"I am still at a loss," said the other. But the current of his blood had ebbed, and his long face showed grey.

Fabrique pulled himself to one side of his chair, with the movement of a man surprised.

"Must I speak more plainly? These things are so much better left unsaid."

"I repeat, I do not understand you." But in his heart Don Sebastian railed against the Fate which, while seeming to befriend him, had played him this trick. "To what do you allude?"

"To the topic of the hour in Madrid. To what else?" cried Fabrique, who found it easier to tackle the situation with a light, rather than a heavy hand; but he meant to get the bit well home before he finished with it.

"You speak of the Prince's death?" For the life of him, at this conjuncture, Sebastian could not use the word murder: but he regained his self-possession. "What do you know of it?"

"I was in the balcony, and——" Fabrique paused.

He breathed hard under the tension of this, the desperate moment; then, with his fat forefinger, he suddenly lunged at the other's breast. "I saw it!"

For an instant Sebastian shook under the light impact, but his narrow gaze never wavered.

"Don Fabrique de Borusta," he said, speaking in his coldest tones, "do I understand that you accuse me——"

Fabrique shot out a reproachful lip.

"Accuse? No, no!"

"Then what?"

"I merely ask you to remember that I am your friend; that for your sake I have done violence to my conscience; that, in fact, you owe me something."

"Ah! now we come at it! Blackmail?"

Fabrique made a deprecating gesture.

"Is not that a word which cuts both ways? I have come to you with my information because you are my friend."

"I was not aware I had that honour!"

" 'The dog does not thank his tail for wagging, but when it is cut off he misses it.' " Fabrique dropped into the vivid vernacular of the class from which he sprang.

"What do you expect to gain by this absurd calumny?" asked Sebastian.

"I could obtain expert opinion as to its value from the town hall, at the palace, from the Embassy who are now in mourning for the Archduke, or, perhaps, best of all, from General de Vayo," Fabrique replied, with some dryness. "I can prove my story very well, believe me, Don Sebastian."

For an instant Don Sebastian was tempted to defy Fabrique, but only for an instant. Ruin stared at him from the fat man's prominent eyes, and he recognised it.

"Bah! A lie would blacken a saint in heaven;

then how can a mere man hope to escape its fouling?" he responded angrily. "To come to the point, what do you expect to gain from me?"

"Nothing—practically nothing. You will, I hope, permit it to be known that I am not excluded from your friendship. I may ask for the benefit of your influence should I apply for an appointment. It is just possible I may occasionally need a few hundred pesetas."

Sebastian made no comment, but his thought betrayed itself in his sinister glance. Fabrique recoiled before it, pushing his chair violently back.

"You will be perfectly safe, Don Sebastian, just so long as I live," he said, gasping.

"'As long as you live'? What new foolery is this?"

"It means that I have written a full account of the events that led up to and culminated in the killing of the Archduke. Should I, by any chance, meet with a sudden or violent death, that paper will at once be placed in the hands of General de Vayo."

"Permit me to point out that your belated evidence may be discounted by the delay in offering it," sneered the other.

Fabrique shook his head.

"No, I do not fear for that. My story carries the impress of intrinsic truth. People can hardly be brought to believe Don Cesar capable of such a quarrel and such a crime, whereas all the world would, before long, credit such an affair in connection with the Count of Lucharvo. I bear no great character for courage, Don Sebastian, and I have taken care to complain in my little historiette of the intimidation I have suffered at your hands. . . . It is a very complete document, I assure you."

"You infernal fox! But how am I to know that you will not take advantage of my—my weakness,

and after all sell your calumnies to some other bidder?"

"Ah, no! Am I not your friend?"

"Curse your friendship!"

"And moreover you will be so much more useful to me alive, at liberty, and in your present position," added Fabrique frankly.

"I will think it over."

"I regret, dear Don Sebastian, that this matter is not one for thought, but for action. Shall we begin with a little loan to carry me over this evening's play at the club?"

When Fabrique was gone, not without a signed document in his pocket confirming his "historiette," Sebastian at last gave way to the fury he had restrained. As he raged up and down, a thousand plans for revenge, for paying back the humiliations of the last hour, crowded upon him. But all the while he was bitterly conscious that none of them could be put into effect. Fabrique had been too crafty to leave a loophole for reprisals. Sebastian knew that he must submit to any demand made upon him for a time—for years, perhaps—but there surely would come a day when, Fabrique's distrust lulled at last, the "historiette" should change hands, and then—then, without delay, without pity—he stopped short, his face set itself like a mask of hatred.

But that day was not yet, for as time went on Sebastian found himself watching over Fabrique de Borusta's safety with an anxiety which maddened him, while he could not escape from it. Once he saved him from a duel with a display of a friendship that produced a crop of sardonic comment upon so unaccountable an alliance.

So the situation developed, while Fabrique's demands grew more frequent, and an intimacy was slowly established between the pair which often drove Don Sebastian to the limits of endurance. Don

Fabrique little guessed how very near he was to death in those early days before the Count of Lucharvo had learned his bitter lesson of self-control, for there were times when he had been tempted to end all by a bullet in his tormentor's brain and one in his own.

Something of this stirred in him as he turned away from Dr. Posada's door still accompanied by his perspiring companion.

"My dear fellow, the necessity to walk so fast is over."

"What do you want?" asked Sebastian roughly.

Fabrique rubbed his fingers on his thumb, and opened his palm in eloquent appeal.

"What, already? Your encroachments become insupportable!"

"Tut, tut! my dear friend, you don't mean that."

"I can raise no more money until I hear from my major-domo in the country," said Sebastian between his teeth, for to touch on this subject with a Spaniard is to touch a raw wound.

Fabrique permitted himself a twist of the lip in his chagrin. Don Sebastian's purse proved a very much shallowed one than he had expected it to be, for he well knew that a man of the noble class would never make such an acknowledgment unless he were already upon the verge of necessity.

"You must marry, Don Sebastian," he suggested agreeably. "I have heard rumours, hopeful rumours."

"I have not asked for your advice."

"No; because you are a little apt to forget that our interests are the same. Besides, as it happens, my advice jumps with your own inclinations." He peered up into Sebastian's dark face with a leer. "She is a beautiful woman, and the only child of a wealthy father. I congratulate you, my dear friend."

Sebastian scowled malignantly at his fat companion.

"What?" resumed Fabrique, with his high-pitched

laugh. "Did you imagine you had hidden your feelings? . . . Why, we have laughed over your comedy of friendship for Don Cesar and your infernal jealousy of him for months past here in Madrid! He, he, he!"

"By God! I could kill you!"

"Oh, no!" Fabrique wagged an admonishing finger.

"Remember! You must listen to me, because my needs are pressing, and in providing for you I make provision, incidentally, for myself."

"Speak, then, and be done with it!"

"Your rival is dead and buried. Therefore your opportunity has come. It rests with yourself to win Doña Dolores."

Sebastian stalked on in silence.

"I sympathise with your difficulties in the matter," continued Fabrique, urged on by an impish humour; "for I own she was devilishly fond of Cesar. I have good reason to know it."

"You know? How?" Sebastian shot the question at him.

But at this Fabrique's dozing prudence awoke.

"I am a gossip, and I hear many a quiet whisper from my cronies, I confess it," he said with a shrug.

"Can I count on you to act on my suggestion?"

"You can count on me," answered Don Sebastian, turning abruptly on his heel.

So they parted, these two to whom the secret of the Archduke Paul's death was wholly known; but neither guessed that the body which slept at Lutoleale was not that of Don Cesar.



Scene from Douglas Fairbanks' Photoplay, "Don Q, Son of Zorro."

"DOLORES, I LOVE YOU," SAID DON Q.

Don Q's Love Story.

CHAPTER XII

THE MEN OF THE HILLS

THE wind of the sierra swept mournfully round the ledge of rock on which Don Cesar lay wrapped in his cloak. The air still held the temperature of a mountain night with the added chill of dawn that ached into the bones.

The two wayfarers, Cesar and Robledo, had, as far as possible, followed unfrequented by-paths, past many little "murder-crosses," sun-wilted and decaying, set on lonely heaps of stone, each bearing its simple and tragic plea: "Pray for the soul of such-a-one killed here." Hiding by day, and pushing on when darkness fell, they left the first danger-zone of Castile behind them.

Crossing the provinces of Toledo, Ciudad Real, and Cordova, Cesar learned the pinch of hunger, for provisions are hard to come by in the waste-lands of the Peninsula. Occasionally they were lucky enough to share a peasant's puchero of vegetables, with its tiny lump of pork for relish, making the daily ration scantier for their host; but the large hospitality of Spain gladly goes short to share its little with the stranger.

It had been an exhausting effort for Cesar, footsore and heart-weary, weakened by wounds and fever, yet forced to undertake many a wide circuit in order to elude any chance encounter with a police patrol, which would inevitably bring about exposure and imprisonment, because of that chief peril, lack of a *cedula*, or passport. But every day the sun shone on them with a

more mellow light, while the greys and greens of the north turned to the gold and blue of the south, until, far in the fourth week of their wandering, the two travellers saw with joy the hedges of prickly pear and dusty palmettos, and knew that they were approaching the Andalucian wilderness.

It is impossible to recount here the dangers, the escapes, the many events of the adventurous journey; but at length they reached the sierra, where Cesar hoped to be able to wait in concealment until the time became ripe for his escape from Spain.

Beyond that the vista of the future stretched empty before him. He could make no definite plans. His life was too newly wrenched from its root to strike afresh. His thoughts dwelt almost exclusively on the near past—the events of that unforgettable day and night. He seemed to have lost the power to detach his mind from the inconceivable alliance of circumstance and treachery which had destroyed him.

The single point ahead for which he lived was the moment when Dolores' reply to his message should reach him. He found a hundred conjectures as to the words she would use, he drew strength and hope from their imagined meaning. Fate had robbed him of all else, but it could not rob him of her love and trust. The storms of despair still beat upon him, but he anchored his soul to her steadfastness.

Long through the night hours he lay wakeful, accompanying with his thoughts; but at last he had sunk into a sleep of exhaustion, so that it required a gentle touch on his shoulder to rouse him.

Robledo stood beside him in the grey of the dawn.

"I have returned, master. I met Tomas, who brought a letter from Tobal, my grandfather." He laid the discoloured envelope in Don Cesar's hand. "Also some newspapers."

Cesar's heart shook as his fingers closed upon the

paper. "Go, Robledo," he said gently. "Eat the food you have with you. As for me, I have no hunger, and I will call when I need you."

The boy climbed obediently out of sight, yet even then Cesar held his precious message close, and gazed out over the long, naked valley which lay grisly in the daybreak, without a blade of grass or a shrub to blur its harsh outlines, only far below in its depths heaps of stones, like cairns, adding to the sense of desolation. He held her dear words in his hand—the alphabet which was to spell his future! Dolores had written! A sentence was scrawled upon the cover, but he took no heed of that as he tore it carefully open. Then his beating heart stopped. The writing was Tobal's.

"There is no message. Many times I have sought her. I have entreated for a word—for a moment. But there was never any answer; she would not even see me. Forgive me, for I have done all that I could; yet, alas! there is no message."

No signature followed; but the ill-formed letters were only too familiar. Cesar read them through again. No message! She would not even see Tobal! His breath strangled him; he grew cold from head to foot. No message!

With sightless eyes he stared out over the dead valley, stunned, motionless, until the sun hung overhead. The rock burned under the pitiless heats of noon as the day wore on, until at length evening brought from the south a rising wind, which blew chill, and served to rouse him from his trance to the full consciousness of mental pain which was to be his companion henceforward.

Dolores indifferent—unresponsive! It was past comprehension. That she might have changed in course of time was possible; but Dolores already untrue to

love, uncaring, refusing word or look to Tobal, when she must have known that some meaning lay underneath the old man's persistency—how could this be?

Far away a white vulture floated up on the breeze and sank slowly to a cairn of stones in the valley, the single moving object within view. It created some reflex action in his mind. He snatched at the newspapers; they might contain some item of news to throw light on Dolores' silence.

He read callously, as one reads of a stranger, the story of the dead body found in a reach of the lower river after the flood, and which had been recognised by Tobal, and buried under his own name—Cesar de Lutoleale and Tarazo. The safety this incident implied was lost upon Cesar, for immediately his eye lit upon a paragraph in another column which alluded explicitly to the impending marriage of Don Sebastian, Count of Lucharvo, with the beautiful daughter of the retiring Lord Chamberlain, the war-tried and gallant soldier, General de Vayo.

Suddenly he recalled the line of writing on the envelope, and tossed the paper aside to find it. It was addressed to Robledo, and the words ran: "Thy grandfather, Christobal Velez, is dead."

So it was all over—all over. His past life broken off to the hilt, and he had meant—— He smiled with twisted lips as he thought of all that he had meant to make of his life! But even in that moment of intolerable suffering he held Dolores blameless. She was young and without defence, and he knew well how powerful a tyranny a Spanish father may wield in his own household.

But events are stronger than our human sorrows and despairs, and soon the unlucky chances of life in the sierra brought about fresh hazards. The two fugitives companied with smugglers, with skulking men of the hills, with starving vagrants, ever flying

before the dangers which were closing in continuously about them. A crime committed by some desperate wanderer had called up into the mountains additional patrols and soldiers, who winnowed the gorges, and many of those who had long found refuge there had been shot down or captured.

Although Cesar's mind seemed a blank to all impressions save the one immitigable fact concerning Dolores, he was at last wakened to effort on Robledo's account. Harried beyond endurance, the Men of the Hills were driven to betray one another, and the possibilities of escape daily narrowed. Robledo's single desperate anxiety was for his master; he made his trouble clear at last even to Cesar's deadened mind. The elder man's sunken eyes glittered suddenly.

"We will lose ourselves," he said.

"Ay di me, master! The Men of the Hills know all the burrows."

Cesar collected his thoughts.

"Not mine," he said. "Come, it is a far climb."

Now it chanced that some years earlier Don Cesar, when hunting ibex alone upon this mountain range, had badly wounded a large ram. As the bullet struck it, the animal pitched forward into a rift below, then, recovering, limped away among the rocks. After some searching, Don Cesar found its tracks, which disappeared again in a crevice of the cliffs, but reconnoitring showed him a drop of blood on the rock-face above. When he climbed at length to the spot he discovered a narrow game-track, which followed a curious fissure in the mountain flank, and led him, after much adventurous scrambling, into a sharply sunk and hidden valley where the ibex lay dead beside a little tinkling cascade of water.

He made a fire of sticks, and slept by it upon the skin of the ram. The light of morning showed him a sheer-sided ravine, overhung on three sides by per-

pendicular cliffs, which ended in an uprunning corner with a crest of pines dark against the sky.

It struck him that here was a spot that only chance could have revealed, and he passed a part of the following day in examining every nook of the hidden combe. He even climbed to the cave, and found it to be more roomy than the narrow opening gave promise of; he mounted to the clump of pines, and saw that an expert mountaineer might make his way up the crevice behind them. Soldier as he was, the strategic possibilities of the place interested him, for he perceived that with but few slight changes it might be made impregnable. A little scientific application of blasting powder would effectually block every hope of exit but one, and that one might, by the aid of an adroitly laid running mine, be turned into the mouth of a natural tunnel of rock, and would become such an entrance as could be held by a couple of men against an army.

During the intervening years Don Cesar had forgotten his discovery, but now he fled to it as naturally as a bird flies to its nest.

Robledo drew closer to his master as he glanced apprehensively up its gloomy length to the crown of pine-trees twisting together under the lash of a squall of wind.

"Master, this gorge plants fear in me. It is black, like a wolf's mouth."

Even while he spoke night fell, as it falls in southerly latitudes, dropping like a cloud from the sky, and in the darkness Don Cesar answered:

"Good! I will call it the Boca de Lobo. We shall be safe in the Wolf's Mouth."

There they found sanctuary for a week, during which Robledo, by some necromancy of his own, probably the trick of the "light finger," fetched back a small amount of gun-cotton from goodness knows

where, the only certain thing about it being that it cost his master nothing. With this Don Cesar experimented, and so slowly worked out his early design of rendering the ravine impregnable from without and unscalable from within. Listlessly he began his labour, and as listlessly completed it, for this surface activity failed to stir those deep-sea waters of bitterness which lay cold within his thoughts.

He would lie by the fire for hours wrapped in envenomed memories, taking no heed of Robledo, who dumbly came and went, bringing such necessary comforts and food as he could compass. But after a time Robledo ceased to leave the valley; he loitered, turning great anxious eyes upon his master, and praying that some occasion for speech might arise. At last, after two days, driven by stress of hunger—for he had eaten little, that Cesar, who observed nothing, might have the more—he spoke.

“Master, shall we starve?”

At the sound of his voice Cesar looked up sharply.

“Have you no money to buy food?” he asked and thrust his hand into his waistcoat and flung out a note or two. Robledo picked them up, but stood waiting as before.

“I cannot, master, for none will sell to me.”

The cruel experiences of his life had already branded their mark upon Cesar.

“Ah, and since when have you sworn off thieving?” he asked cynically.

But the scorn transmuted itself into a reproach in Robledo’s loyal ears.

“I have stolen much,” he protested, “but now many are on the watch for me. I should go forth and try again, but I know they are lying in wait for me, and if they catch me, who then will steal for you any more?”

“Steal for me?” Cesar smiled oddly to himself. Robledo’s affection still had power to appeal to him.

"Let me hear the reason why they lie in wait for you."

"Evil days have come upon the mountains—so evil that many men have joined themselves together and have chosen a leader." He hesitated.

Don Cesar looked up indifferently.

"Ah, and who is this leader? A foe?"

Robledo shook his head.

"No; for it is you, master."

At this amazing announcement Cesar broke out into harsh laughter. "And why should they do me this honour?"

"Because it is you alone who can save them."

"I?" Cesar was now genuinely interested.

"Yes, master, for they are hard pressed, and they know that you have a hiding-place where they might be secure from pursuit."

"And so they have sent you to me with this offer?"

"Even so, master, for none have been able to find the Boca de Lobo, not even their old captain, Gaspar, who knows the mountain as he knows his mother's face."

For a long time Cesar stared into the fire, and as the situation opened before his eyes, a tinge of blood slowly coloured his thin cheeks.

"Where are these men who want a master?" he asked, at last.

"In a camp above the cork-woods where the Alta Lanza rises. I could reach those who are camped there by midday."

"And if you reach them, what have you to tell them?"

"I will tell them that if my lord saves their lives, they shall be his men from now onwards for ever."

"That will remain to be proved." Cesar rose. "No; I have another plan. I will borrow your gun, Robledo and you shall lead me to the camp, for I desire to speak with the Men of the Hills."

Robledo looked into his master's face. The listless misery had left it, and the eyes burned with a light that he was destined to see there often in the days to come. Then, eagerly and with excessive care, he looked to the condition of his old smoothbore before placing it in the hands of Don Cesar.

"It is a good gun, master," he said proudly, for on its quality he relied as the probable determining factor of the coming interview.

Cesar led the way from the ravine, passing through the tunnel which was now the only exit, and they began an arduous journey across the mountains to the vagrants' camp. During the interval he had spent in the Boca de Lobo, Cesar's wounds had healed, and his strength came back to him under the invigoration of rest and the keen, pure air. Most of his boyhood and youth had been spent in the wild Lutoleale country, so that before he had arrived at manhood few of the mountaineers could surpass him in the art of hill travel. In later years there were none who could do so; and on this capability was to rest no small part of his influence with his half-savage followers.

CHAPTER XIII

DON Q.

DON CESAR travelled fast as he headed towards the camp where the vagrants lay. The necessity for a decided course of action came as an anodyne. For the first time since he had received Tobal's letter, his mind was forced to occupy itself with a matter entirely apart from Dolores and his troubles. It is difficult to say if his thoughts ran at all beyond the intention of grappling with the immediate situation, nor had he time to look forward to the clouded future. His whole nature had been deeply injured by the events which had wrested his life from its socket and flung him abroad at the mercy of his kind; but that the course to which he was so soon to find himself committed was the result of premeditation none who ever knew Cesar de Lutoleale could lightly believe.

As a matter of fact, he recorded long after, in his diary, that he was much occupied during this hurried journey in imagining the point of view of Gaspar and his twenty or thirty shaggy *campañeros*, whose like he had up to this time only dealt with when they had been dragged before him by his own forest guards at Lutoleale. He did not make the mistake of under-rating the risk he ran. The men were hard pressed, wild with fear, and dominated by the surly Gaspar, who must have already shown himself to have some capacity for leadership, since men in a panic will always and unerringly surrender themselves to the guidance of the most capable.

Robledo found his strength strained to the utmost

as he followed at full speed; but they were not destined to reach the camp without adventure, for as they made their way down through the pine region, from behind the shelter of a bent tree, flat-topped by the weight of winter snows, a man sprang to his feet with a levelled weapon, all the ferocity of the hunted glinting in his eyes. Don Cesar had only time to leap aside as the charge of slugs and nails, bound together with fat, tore its way through the bushes beside him.

The next moment, the man was on his back.

"You fool! Who are you?"

The fellow blinked at him from the ground.

"Pardon, señor; I am the sentinel of the camp yonder."

"I see that if I am indeed going to lead you, and such as you," said Cesar, "I shall have to teach you to keep a better watch. Tie his hands, Robledo."

Under the lad's expert handling, the vagrant was soon secured with his own waistband. Cesar, with the gun in the hollow of his arm, scanned the ragged, bearded creature,

"Do not kill me, señor, do not kill me!" he pleaded, in fear of the cold eyes. "Spare me, and I will tell you something it will be good for you to hear."

"Speak then!"

"I know you now. You are he who has found a hiding-place in the sierra from which a man may laugh at the law. Is it not so?"

Cesar made a gesture of assent.

"And you are coming because we of the Hills have sent for you to be our captain, and to lead us to safety. This was the message that Gaspar gave to Robledo. He will bear me witness." He looked at Robledo.

"The Master knows," answered the lad.

"Then turn back, señor."

There was a hint of the old freakish humour in Cesar's face.

"I never turn back!"

The vagrant stared.

"Yet," he said, with a crooked smile, "you will do well to turn back now, even if it be for the first time. For—listen, señor—we have already a leader, and a cunning one."

Cesar nodded.

"Gaspar of the Hare-lip. This plan is his. 'Come,' said he, 'we will send a message to this man without a name—a wily message which will bring him to our camp. He has discovered a place of hiding where all may be safe from pursuit. We will lure him among us in this manner, and then we will force him to tell us of this secret defile, this garganta in the rocks, which none can overlook or find out.' There! I have told you. A life for a life. I have saved yours; give me mine and take me, Turic, back with you to the Wolf's Mouth."

"Come, then," said Cesar.

Robledo released the man in silence.

Immediately they set out, Cesar first, through the brown shadows of the wood. The vagrant touched his shoulder.

"Stop, señor! You are walking straight in the direction of Gaspar's camp!"

Cesar turned on him; the hand dropped from his shoulder.

"And in what other direction should I walk?" he asked gently. But in spite of the soft tone, Turic shrank back and regarded him curiously.

The retreat of Gaspar and his stricken fellows was at a high level, for, like the ibex, who climbs ever upwards before the pursuing hunter, so had the vagrants swarmed away from the warmer valleys, where

bay and laurestinus offered shelter, to the heights, which, at this season, were bitterly cold.

The day was already waning, and the wind whined among the jumble of crags and boulders ahead.

"We are near," said Turic at last. "I will give the cry."

A hooting cry answered him, and as they ascended there was a visible movement among the rocks, but so slight that the eye could scarcely be sure of it.

"Halt! Who comes with you?" cried a rough voice.

Turic looked back over his shoulder.

"Señor, what shall I tell them?"

Don Cesar paused, and looked round. Here was a dilemma. What name should he give? But as he looked, the answer came to him. A splendid black and white vulture, which had been hanging high in the blue ether on pointed, motionless wings, suddenly swept downwards over the outlaw's camp. A laugh, such as had long been a stranger to Cesar, broke from him.

"I will send a messenger to announce my name," he said, and laid the old, long-barrelled gun to his shoulder, and pressed the trigger. There was the thud of a striking bullet. The great bird spun round and round, left its life in the air, and fell in the centre of the camp.

A sudden hubbub arose and the cries of men as, from behind the rampart of boulders, the Men of the Hills poured forth, in a stream of garish colour, headed by a formidable figure, his thick hair hanging upon his neck. Then there was a check, for the three newcomers in the shadow of a rock were invisible to the advancing company, and it may be that both Turic and Robledo would have preferred to remain so, had not Don Cesar stepped out into the sunlight.

The big man drew back instinctively at this abrupt appearance; then his teeth showed through his beard in a triumphant bellow.

"It is the man!" he cried. "So you have come?"

"I have come," replied Cesar, "because it has reached my ears that you desired a leader, and have chosen me."

His blue, stern eyes held Gaspar's for the fraction of a second.

"Back to the camp!" Gaspar's order rose high. "Back, and take the new captain with us!"

There was an open challenge in the contemptuous voice. More than one man ran forward to hustle Don Cesar up the slope, but Robledo sprang in front of them.

"Make way there! Give room!" he cried.

Gaspar stopped, as if to speak, but restrained himself. No sooner were they gathered within the camp, however, than he faced round. Behind him a fire, protected in a trench from the restless wind, flared pale in the sun, and at his feet lay the tumbled plumage of the dead vulture.

"Which of you dared to kill this bird so near to the camp?" he asked peremptorily.

Cesar, to all appearance, did not hear the question as he gazed about at the wretched appurtenances of the bivouac; but Turic replied:

"It was the señor. Madre de Dois! A fine shot, that."

"Caramba! Do you not know you will have drawn the civiles upon us?" demanded Gaspar, glad to find so good a cause of quarrel ready to his hand.

"Ay, it is so!" growled the men.

"Yes; but since you have elected me as your leader, you will be far away in safety before they come," Cesar addressed the crowd.

"Leader! Ho, ho!" Gaspar was working up to his point quicker than he had intended. "Where is your accursed hiding-place? Tell me that."

"Why should I tell you? What are you, more than your companions?" asked Cesar gently.

The fine-toned voice, the well-bred, slender figure and haughty face, appealed to many there with the prerogative of caste, which is perhaps even more strongly felt in Spain than it is elsewhere.

"I am their leader! What? Did you think you could supplant me? That you could stand in my shoes?" shouted Gaspar.

Don Cesar's brows grew together.

"This honour" (he laid a scornful emphasis on the word), "was offered to me. I did not seek it. Yet, since I am here, I am not minded to go back without it."

The Men of the Hills pressed in a little; there were cross-currents of feelings among them and of this, by the instinct of leadership, both Cesar and his protagonist were aware.

"As to going back, that you shall do in good time," replied Gaspar, cunningly altering the line of argument. "We have yet to learn who you are, and where you come from."

Cesar smiled suddenly.

"Where did the bone-breaker, the *quebranta-huesos*, come from?" He pointed at the dead vulture.

"It is well, comrades," murmured a few. "Let us follow him. It is well."

"It is not well," cried Gaspar. You fools! This man is an aristocrat. He is here to betray us. No, no! Seize him! See how the fire flames! Very soon we shall possess the secret of his hiding-place."

The counter-appeal was well timed, for a voice growled:

"Gaspar is right. I know these aristocrats. Doubtless this one is in the pay of the civiles!"

Don Cesar, with a slight movement, drew all eyes to himself.

"Men, the choice lies with you. Which do you choose?"

Cries and counter-cries filled the air.

"Don Quebranta-Huesos, the bone-breaker! We choose Don Quebranta-Huesos!" mingled with shouts for "Gaspar! Gaspar! Viva Gaspar!"

"Hear!" Cesar's order rang clear. "Let us put it to the proof which of us is the better fitted to be your master."

A lull fell on the uproar.

"It is well said!" Gaspar thrust out his bearded chin jeeringly. "Shall I follow a man I can crush between my fingers?"

Without warning, the knotted figure rushed upon Don Cesar, charging him with his great head down and his knife drawn.

Cesar retreated a step or two. With one hand he plucked from his belt the knife he had taken from Turic, and in the other he held a handkerchief. Then, as Gaspar closed, the handkerchief flipped out across his eyes, the lithe body of Cesar (used to the tactics of bull-fighting) sprang to one side, and his right hand shot out with a flash. Gaspar stumbled and fell to his knees, the hilt of the knife protruding between his shoulders.

Howls of excitement rose from the men; they yelled the "Vivas" of the bull-ring, they cheered for Cesar as for a great espada who had just given the death-blow.

"Here is one whom indeed we will follow! It was a thrust—a good thrust!"

Cesar looked down at the heaving mass of Gaspar's back, then up at the faces round with a mocking glance.

"You are mistaken, friends. This is not a death-blow, not the blow of the espada; it is but the prick of a banderillo."

The vagrants laughed, and with that touch of ridicule Gaspar's authority fell from him for ever.

At the same moment an alarm arose: "The civiles! The civiles!" And the panic-stricken crowd began a mad stampede. But in front of them stood their new leader, with upflung arm.

"Steady, men—steady! You, Turic, and you" (he pointed to another vagrant), "carry Gaspar. His wound is slight. I did not drive the steel home. He will live to cut wood and carry water for me in my camp up above. Now divide into three parties, and hold back the civiles who come yonder. It will be easy among these crags, for the sun grows low."

So until the sun sunk, and night covered the mountains, a fight raged; and the Men of the Hills, filled with a new confidence, drove back their opponents. But when in the morning the forces of the Government came up once more to the attack, they found the camp deserted. For under cover of darkness Cesar had withdrawn his party. So it came to pass that by the following evening a score or so of broken and hunted men climbed into the safety of the Boca de Lobo.

But as soon as their first thankfulness for escape had worn off, they proved hard to hold. Yet Don Cesar held them. By what arguments he did so will never be known, but soon rumour began to be whispered that a power had arisen in the mountains. Travellers and goatherds brought back tales of passes patrolled and of rallying cries that rang from cliff to cliff, and the civiles and carbineers spoke of fights and skirmishes in which the outlaws frequently triumphed. And so gradually from the haze of rumour there grew out a human figure—that of a young man whose word was law, and who never forgot a friend nor forgave an enemy. This man was called Don Q., after the neophron, the bone-breaking vulture, locally the *quebranta-*

huesos, whose beak finds the inmost marrow of all things.

And as the frame of this guerilla chief increased expeditions were sent up against him, but always with the same result. Many went into the sierra, but fewer returned, and those who came back told strange stories of his skill, his powers, and, above all, of his reckless daring; so that the fame of Don Q. was noised abroad through the length and breadth of Andalucia.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE WOLF'S MOUTH

IN the sierra the seasons ebbed and flowed, and the ruthless exigencies of life moulded Cesar de Lutoleale slowly and through many hours of painful thought and loneliness to a man of changed ideals. The highest qualities of his character actually furthered this alteration. To mention one; although Destiny made him a guerilla chief, Nature had been beforehand with Destiny, and created him to be one, equipped with every natural gift for the position. How far the sense of capability in any direction influences a man's life need not be enlarged upon.

When he first undertook to safeguard the Men of the Hills, Cesar had turned all the strength of his personality and of a powerful intellect to cope with that almost forlorn hope, and had achieved success; thus when he definitely threw in his lot with the outcasts of the sierra, he found the human machinery he himself had linked into working order ready to his hand. His original score or so of ragged followers had been increased by a number of recruits, and this in spite of the many rejected as falling short of the physical standard he had early established as a qualification for admission to his band. To him as to the ancient outlaw in the Cave of Adullam gathered "every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was bitter of soul." It was dangerous material to handle, but Don Cesar understood the uses of an inexorable discipline.

This was, moreover, only a part of his organisation, for he had also set on foot a system of collecting intelligence that slowly ramified throughout the province. Hence he was always armed with an accurate knowledge of the lives of others which threw into a luried relief the mystery that enveloped his own. He took counsel of none, and none shared his plans. Thus he had already won for himself a place in the imagination of a highly imaginative people; and this proved to be an asset of the utmost value in the life to which he was pledged.

It was but natural that his Spanish passion for revenge should grow during those years of brooding. To have any hope of gaining that, he must attain power. By the law he was broken, therefore his hand must be against the law. Or it may rather be said that he became a law unto himself. And it was out of the chaos of his past life that he drew the ideals of the new. He grew to regard brigandage not only as a fine art but as a far from ignoble career. To the limits of the mountain region he governed with a firm hand, dealing out justice to the poorer folk according to his own drastic code, and with an impartiality not to be found in the accredited courts of the land. And the people far and wide sought his jurisdiction.

From his eyrie in the mountains he carried on his war against the rich and those in authority, a task of no small magnitude, in which the slightest mistake or oversight could only end in destruction. His rewards for good service done, and his punishment for treachery or false intelligence, were equally excessive, but they ensured that which he desired.

As the years went on he won many an adherent in the countryside from the supreme fact that he was known to be a staunch friend. For he was ruled by a scrupulous, if now warped, sense of honour; a promise made by him never failed to be kept, but on

the other hand a threat was fulfilled with the same punctilious thoroughness. Every act contributed to the enhancement of his mysterious reputation. Few had seen him, but all knew of him, and most had left his power. It was generally believed that he had cognisance of what was said or done or even thought over many square miles of the wild region which owned his sway. And though expeditions to exterminate him were sent up from time to time to the black gorges, each ended in a similar woefulness of defeat.

The name of Don Q., the unconquerable brigand who dragooned half a province, was become famous. His exploits of daring, of courage, of what seemed a diabolical ingenuity, flashed out like brilliant pictures upon public knowledge, but after each he would lapse again into that hidden existence "up above there," as the peasants said, waving an eloquent hand towards the mountains. And for all these things Andalusia adored him the more.

Such local news as there was filtered through many channels to the Boca de Lobo, carried by wandering goatherds, charcoal-burners, farmers, his own men; and the hundred and one persons whose business he made it all brought information for Don Q. At first rarely, but more often later, a packet of newspapers would reach him, and these told him of the world beyond.

Soon after his coming to the sierra, a half-obliterated bridle-path, that led to a square white house among the marshes, was trodden clear by the feet of his men, who passed to and fro to gather news of the owner, Don Sebastian, Count of Lucharvo. Sometimes rumour had it that the Count had gone to the Biscay coast to take up an excellent appointment whereby he would improve his fortunes. Again would arise reports of his return and of his approaching mar-

riage with Doña Dolores de Vayo of Vicente, and gay doings were prophesied on his estates when this should come to pass.

Don Q. saw by the papers that Dolores had resumed her place in society, but the months flowed on, and no mention of marriage connected itself with her name. He wondered sometimes that she should keep faith with Sebastian, whom in the old days she had disliked. But he had no knowledge of the vigilance, the whisperings, with which Borusta contrived to erect an intangible barrier round the girl.

More than five years had passed, and it was now the fifth September that Don Q. had spent in the mountains. Lord of a wide desolation, time often hung heavy on his hands, for intervals of monotony recurred more frequently as the organisation of his followers and of his far-cast net for gathering news became fairly adjusted, and these were the periods which cost him dear. No event of any personal importance to himself had happened since a six-months' old report of Sebastian's intended return. A prolonged fit of depression, such as was now not uncommon in his experience, had weighed upon him for days. Existence seemed to have come to a standstill, a curtain of silence hung between him and his past, he felt himself, as it were, in a world where nothing moved or lived any longer.

After all, though men weigh the North Star and analyse the sweet influences of the Pleiades, not the wisest among us can tell what a moment may bring forth. This is the ineffaceable brand of our mortality.

It was night in the mountains, but the rising moon threw a white light into the sky, though the Boco de Lobo, under its sheer cliffs, lay in a gloom focussed by the glow of a single watch-fire. With the small hours a wind rose to harry troops of broken clouds across the zenith like an enemy in pursuit. The squall

blew itself out as the moon mounted higher, but the flood of her light, hidden by the bulk of a summit black against the south, had not even yet slanted into the valley. The hundred voices of the mountains drowned the soft footfalls that without ceasing patrolled the night hours through, back and forth on the terrace hung high upon the cliffside. A cloaked figure moved unseen against the dark background of living rock, until the moon swung clear of the escarpments which towered above his head. As Don Q. turned, a broad stream of light fell on the storm-torn crest of pines at the farther end of the valley. He stopped and looked up with eyes haunted by sleeplessness. As in a vision he seemed to see all that the moon gazed upon—the close-woven tapestries of life. Gradually one picture blotted out all the rest—Dolores as he remembered her—but he thrust the thought from him; then Sebastian, with his averted eyes and malign purposes; after that, the slinking, half-seen figure among the pillars outside the room where fate had destroyed him. What did it all mean? Should he ever read the riddle of that night? Weeks had lengthened into months, and the slow months grown to years, and still he pondered vainly on that past. Painfully word by word, event by event, taxing his memory to recall any lost item of those days of early January, he spent himself in a treadmill of remembrance, not imagining that the very moment was bringing him a herald of fate.

A slight sound and the challenge of the sentry posted at the mouth of the tunnel roused him. A tall figure emerged from the dark and stood by the watch-fire.

"Is the master awake?"

It was Robledo returned. A sibilant whistle summoned him as Don Q. retreated into the cave and threw a fresh log of pine-wood on the waning fire. It flamed up at once, and showed the sinewy figure of

the young fellow as he stood waiting for his master to speak.

From under the low-drawn sombrero Don Q. surveyed him. Robledo had become a handsome man, though with the sad and rather lined good looks of the mountaineer. Like a mountaineer, also, he was dressed in leather, very worn, but belted with a new crimson faja, and a crimson handkerchief was bound about his head.

"You have returned quickly.

"Yes, master, for I heard much at the posada de la Hermandad, and hastened back with the news."

Don Q. nodded.

"The new Civil Governor has arrived at Castelleno, and——"

"His name?"

"The señor Don Fabrique de Borusta."

Don Q. drew in his breath sharply. The name startled him, as a cry startles a listener in the quiet of the night. For five years he had lost trace of Don Fabrique.

"Ah! And they say he is a man to be feared?"

Robledo was quite unaware of the irony of the question.

"Some say so, master. He is of a great fatness, and very cunning. So they told me at the farm in the marshes which belongs to his Excellency the Count of Lucharvo. The people at the farm know the señor de Borusta, for he is a near friend of their lord, Don Sebastian."

"And Don Sebastian still remains in Madrid?"

"No, master; he also is newly arrived in Castelleno, for the Government have named him Military Comandante of the Province."

"Ah! Then the Count of Lucharvo is also in Castelleno?"

"Yes, master. But Pépé of the farm says that the marriage has been postponed——"

"His marriage with whom?"

"With the señorita Doña Dolores de Vayo. It has long been expected."

"True—it has long been expected," repeated Don Q.

Although Robledo was not ignorant of the position his master had filled in the world before he fled to the mountains, he guessed nothing of the significance these names carried. As to Cesar, their mere utterance shook him, so closely were they woven into the fabric of his inner life, and years had elapsed since he had heard them spoken aloud.

"The marriage has been again postponed. Why?" he asked after a pause.

"Because, master, they have sworn to crush you—those two in Castelleno, for thus have the tyrants at Madrid ordered. There will be trouble, for his Excellency the Comandante is of an ugly temper, and he is making great preparations against us. If you should be captured or killed, that would bring him much honour on his marriage-day."

"We must not neglect, Robledo, to do what we can to add to his reputation," Don Q. laughed drily. "And the—bride?"

"For the moment the señorita is at San Vicente, with his Excellency her father."

Don Q. fell silent. Dolores was again at San Vicente on the ridge! Every year she had spent a few weeks there with her father, and San Vicente was but a short twelve hours' travelling from his eyrie in the Boca de Lobo, yet he had not once attempted to see her. Now, the kaleidoscope of fate, turning slowly, had thrown together something of the old pattern that it held on the day of Prince Paul's tragedy. He roused himself at last.

"And Lola, your wife? Have you seen her? Was she at her father's house?" he asked.

Robledo shook his head.

"No, master; only the little Robledo. Lola left the posada a week ago, and, as you ordered, has taken service in the house of the new Governor."

"And it happens to be the household of Fabrique de Borusta," muttered Don Q. to himself; then he added aloud: "Good! She has done well; she has lost no time; she shall not miss her reward."

"No, master," said Robledo sadly.

Don Q.'s eye glinted on his attitude of dejection, and a smile just curled his lip.

"So you missed seeing your wife, Robledo? Do not despond! You shall shortly be given leave to go down to Castelleno. But not yet. There is much work to be done—much work to be done. You can go."

Alone beside his fire, Don Q. sat brooding hour after hour, rolling and smoking an endless succession of cigarettes. The sun had passed its meridian before he rose and went out upon the terrace, alert, ready for action, his depression gone for the time. And thereupon a period of excitement, adventure, and exploit such as can never be forgotten in the tales of the countryside.

CHAPTER XV

DON SEBASTIAN

JUTTING boldly from the main bulk of the sierra a ridge is thrust forth like a half-bent arm into the southward plain, descending gradually from the high shoulder of the mountains until it merges into the level some miles to the north-west of Castelleno. On the lower point of this ridge stood the house of San Vicente, which was indeed little more than a farm upon the fringe of sloping woodlands, a long building with small windows set high in its white walls above the arch of a gateway that was heavily barred and secured at night-time.

Although few people of the richer sort lived much in their country houses near the sierra, General de Vayo, with his daughter and her duenna, had been in the habit of spending a few weeks of each year at Vicente, for the sake of the mountain air. The few spacious rooms in the upper storey supplied all the accommodation the family needed, the furniture was simple and spare, but this circumstance does not appear in the light of a hardship to Spanish people, who will also cheerfully accept the roughest fare as one of the necessary accompaniments of country living.

The De Vayos had been for some weeks at San Vicente, but October had come, and Dolores was aware that the time for lingering in the cool, delicious solitude of the woodlands was drawing to an end. She dreaded the return to Castelleno, for Sebastian was there. During occasional visits to Madrid he had again and again laid himself, figuratively, at her feet;

and her father, considering his parental authority outraged by her continued refusals, had treated her with increasing harshness, and a far greater severity than had been possible five years earlier, when her health forbade actual persecution.

Although General de Vayo seldom addressed Dolores directly, he talked freely with Doña Carlotta of Sebastian's ambitious career. He flattered himself that his nominee was justifying his recommendations, and he felt a personal pride in every report of his growing honours.

On this sunny October morning the table for the midday meal was spread under a group of trees close to the house.

"We must return to Castelleno by the end of the week." The General turned his chair from the table as he spoke, and rolled a cigarette.

"For me, I shall be delighted," exclaimed Doña Carlotta. "For there we shall meet Don Sebastian and that charming Don Fabrique, who always can make me laugh."

"I cannot conceive why they made Don Fabrique Civil Governor," said Dolores. "He looks a very foolish person."

The general frowned.

"He is a friend of Sebastian's. As for being a fool—no, he is no fool."

Dolores rose and walked to the brow of the hill, and looked out over the plain below.

The air was clear, sparkling, full of life; and the lower ground, reviving after the heats of summer, stretched away in patches of grey, of green, and golden brown, till it culminated about the slight rise of the headland far away on which stood Castelleno by the sea. In the pastures cattle were grazing, and a pool on a distant swamp caught the sunlight, and gleamed for a moment like a jewel from its bed of rushes. As

Dolores looked, she saw a horseman canter into sight from a small wood, and, checking his pace, begin the sharp ascent of the road which led to San Vicente.

"There is some one riding to the house. I wonder who it can be?" Dolores turned. "We have not many visitors here."

She met her father's stern eyes, and knew before he spoke.

"I am expecting Sebastian," he said coldly.

At once Doña Carlotta rose and returned to the house. If there was to be a domestic storm, then Dolores must bear the brunt of it alone, since it was her obstinacy which caused it.

Dolores also gathered up her fan and mantilla, as if about to follow, but the General interposed.

"Sebastian must see you. Do not let your reply be a foregone conclusion, I beg of you. He has been very patient, very constant. You have not deserved it."

"Neither have I desired it, father," she replied with spirit.

"He has great qualities," continued De Vayo. "He is strong, intelligent, farseeing; his abilities must ultimately make him one of our leading men."

Dolores laughed a little.

"Then he will have his consolations, however I may decide; for his ambitions mean more to a man than a wife!"

"Possibly. Yet Sebastian is the husband I have chosen for you, and there is an end of it."

Dolores closed her lips, and when the new Comandante appeared permitted him to kiss her hand with his usual air of tenderness. But it was soon apparent that love-making was not the thought which primarily occupied his mind that morning. His swarthy face was clouded, and his narrow eyes seemed closer set under his drawn brows.

"I shall be relieved when you return to Castelleno, General," he said, as he laid down the glass of cool sherbet he had asked for. "That ruffian in the sierra, who calls himself Don Q., grows more bold and dangerous every day. We are taking precautions, of course, and we have troops ready to make a cordon round this district, but I should not easily forgive myself if he molested you here at San Vicente."

"I have heard much of Don Q.," said Dolores (little knowing she spoke of Cesar). "I could almost wish he would come; I should like to see him."

"Chut! You know nothing of these matters, Dolores," interrupted the General irritably. "What has Don Q. been doing now?" He turned to Sebastian.

"Everything that a brigand can do to defy the law. He has taken captives."

"Oh, but he does not ill-treat them!" exclaimed Dolores.

Sebastian raised his eyebrows eloquently. What man living could tabulate the vagaries of a woman's mind, even of a good woman such as Dolores?

"Perhaps not, but he has succeeded in securing large ransoms for every one of them, nevertheless. Do you also make a hero of him, Doña Dolores?"

"Of course not! But one cannot help admiring his courage."

"Is it necessary to be a malefactor to win your sympathy?" said Sebastian in a low tone.

General de Vayo leant back with a satisfied air.

"Now that you and Don Fabrique have taken the affair in hand, you will soon make an end of Don Q. It will be another of your triumphs, Sebastian," he said.

"I hope so. I have a plan nearly ripe for execution which should finish his affair. In the meantime, he has been even more active and troublesome since

Fabrique took up the appointment in Castelleno. He captured two sportsmen about a month ago, an Englishman and an American; and the matter has led to something like an international dispute. It is monstrous that the fellow should not have been crushed out of existence long ago!"

"I suspected something fresh had occurred, but I do not permit my people at the house to tell me of his exploits; it merely encourages their inbecile admiration of him."

Sebastian flung out an angry hand. "Ah! there you touch the very source of the trouble. The chief difficulty in our undertaking is the fact that it is almost impossible to gain reliable information about him. He has had the wit to make himself popular. And there is a freakish ingenuity about some of his escapades, which sets the countryside laughing, and they adore him all the more for that! For example, Fabrique sent a spy into the mountains some time ago. The man was an adventurer of dangerous type, and the scheme really looked promising. Before starting from Castelleno, the fellow gave out that he had come into a fortune, and would shortly look for a wife."

Sebastian shrugged his shoulders.

"Don Q. detected him, and forced him to marry an old hag in the mountains, on the ground that as he had made him miss a fortune, he was bound to find him a wife. But I imagine it is very nearly the last joke Don Q. is likely to be able to indulge in."

Dolores looked at Sebastian, and hated him. His whole frame and being seemed usurped and animated by his power of animosity, a sinister hatred far beyond the reach of mercy."

Suddenly Sebastian looked up.

"I should like to know you were safe in the city, General, before we attempt our final stroke," he said.

General de Vayo rose up.

"I will myself accompany you to Castelleno this evening. To-morrow I will send the carriage for Dolores."

"I am delighted to hear it, sir. We shall be glad of your advice, for we made an important arrest last evening."

"Eh? Who?"

"The foremost of Don Q.'s followers, a man called Robledo. He was recognised by a civil guard lurking about Fabrique's house. He fought desperately, but they captured him. Luckily, I myself can swear to his being one of the brigand's men."

"I hope you mean his punishment to be exemplary?" Old De Vayo looked at him straightly.

"I think you may trust me for that, sir. It shall be exemplary. If I may be permitted to hasten you, General, I think we should start in about an hour."

"Certainly, certainly, Sebastian. I will order my baggage to be sent on. Dolores"—he glanced with stern meaning at his daughter from behind Sebastian's head—"I will leave you to entertain our guest. Doña Carlotta shall join you presently."

But many minutes passed, and Doña Carlotta did not appear. Dolores sat idly touching her guitar, while Sebastian, plunged in a troubled reverie, stared at the ground. At length he raised his head.

"Forgive me. You know what I would say to you, Dolores. My life has spoken more strongly for me than any words. You know that I love you."

Dolores struck a chord or two that seemed to laugh upon the strings. She would not allow the talk to become earnest if she could avoid it.

"I have often wondered if you do."

He did not meet her smile.

"Can you say that to me after the years in which I have proved my faithfulness?" he asked gravely.

"Yes; for I believe that you do not love me." She



Scene from Douglas Fairbanks' Photoplay, "Don Q, Son of Zarro."
"WHERE WERE YOU WHEN THIS HAPPENED?" DON CESAR DEMANDED
OF DON SEBASTIAN.
Don Q's Love Story.

touched herself lightly on the breast. "Not Dolores de Vayo, but the woman who has always said 'No' to you."

"I am sorry——" he began.

His tone alarmed her.

"Please do not take me too seriously. I do not wish to offend you, but you are one of those people to whom opposition is the salt of life. It is because I cannot do as you wish that you imagine you still care for me."

"It is cruel to misunderstand me in this manner." He spoke bitterly. "Because I have proved myself to be a constant and devoted lover, therefore you accuse me of an unpardonable obstinacy. What can a man do in the face of such misunderstanding?"

"It sounds as if I were judging you rather hardly, but I feel it is true."

"That I merely wish to bully you into marrying me?"

"Well, I think you wish to overcome my reluctance. I fear that I am very ungrateful for all your constancy." She altered her tone. "Don Sebastian, I must speak quite plainly. I cannot believe that you love me, or that you ever have loved me."

"I was prepared for some injustice from you, because your mind is warped against me, but not for this," he said in a low, wounded voice.

"Oh, I am ready to tell you why! If you truly loved me, could you have followed me, urged your wishes, importuned me so cruelly five years ago, when my heart was broken? You could not have made my life wretched if you had loved me! You have turned my father against me. Was that because you loved me?"

"When a man loves as I do, and did, he does not stop to think of a moment's suffering, for he well knows he can make up for it afterwards. I am the

man who loves you, and who can make you happy."

"Never, never!" she exclaimed.

"Dolores, give me the opportunity of teaching you to love me?" he pleaded.

She could not avoid looking at him; he was close beside her. He was little changed. The good looks he had possessed he possessed still. The years had but made him browner and leaner, and the few grey hairs that had appeared about his temples lent him something of distinction. To many women he would have been an acceptable lover, but one rapid glance told Dolores that he still had the power to fill her with the old repulsion.

"It is impossible!" she said vehemently.

"Have you not thought that by pleasing me you will make your father a very happy man?"

"Yes; but nothing can alter my determination. I would make him happy if I could. God knows, I would win his love back to me if I saw any means—any means likely to win it. But to be your wife would only end in misery—misery to you and to me, and therefore, naturally, to him also."

"Even for your father's sake will you not listen to me?"

"No, Don Sebastian. Love you! I far less than love you!"

"What has set you so against me?" he asked abruptly. "Did any one ever say anything to set you against me?"

"No; why should you think it? I have never pretended to care for you. You have always known that," she protested. "It is not as if I were moved by some whim. I have always been the same."

He walked up and down once, swinging his riding-whip in his hand: then drew up before her.

"Dolores, will you marry me?"

The pertinacity implied in the simple question horrified her.

"Have I not said enough already? How am I to convince you?"

"You will never convince me," he said. "Dolores, I hunger for your love!"

She turned coldly away without replying.

"It is I who should wish to convince you," he continued, after a moment. "If the days of knight-errantry were not over, I could convince you of my love. I could do some great deed. But there are no dragons, no giants left to be conquered in Spain."

"There is yet Don Q.," she retorted, with a little scornful smile.

"Dolores!" He came eagerly towards her. "If I succeed against him, you will——"

"Oh, my dear Don Sebastian, it is delightful to receive a visitor in this lonely spot!"

Doña Carlotta, fresh and buxom as the day, was hurrying out to greet him.

Sebastian turned to Dolores.

"You have spoken Don Q.'s death sentence!" he said in a cold voice.

CHAPTER XVI

THE POSADA OF RAMON

THE posada of Ramon Laruna stands at the apex of three rather sketchy roads. One leads upwards towards the overhanging sierra, and is little more than the bed of a river torrent, dry and sandy enough for the moment; a second track dips into the lower ground and runs its deep ruts through the red soil for a few leagues towards San Vicente; the third, deeper rutted still, winds away downwards through chaparros and huge boulders of grey granite and sandstone, where foxes and lizards flick out of sight at the footstep of the rare passer-by, until it gains the comparative contour of a road as it enters the town of Castelleno.

Ramon was not a little proud of his posada, which, indeed, stood in a most favourable position for business. Long strings of mules and gaily clothed muleteers halted daily at his door; and of late more than once a company of soldiers had passed the night on the earthen floor among his other guests. For his posada was more than a humble inn where the traveller found salt, a chance to cook over the three-holed charcoal stove, and room to roll himself in his manta for the night; yet it was but a long, one-storeyed building, with wooden shutters to the small, paneless windows, and stabling for a few mules at the lower end of its dark interior.

On the day following Don Sebastian's visit to San Vicente, a pale light still lingered in the west, but the chill night wind was blowing from the mountains, and

Ramon had early shut his door upon it. Within, the scene was picturesque. Ramon himself was busily fanning the charcoal in the stove with a grass mat, two girls and two men were dancing to the music of a guitar, while in the background, under a wall-lamp, three muleteers and a roughly dressed fellow like a goatherd were busy with cards. Rather in the shade, an ugly, sombre-looking mountaineer in worn clothes of leather, lounged on a ledge in the wall his gun still held between his knees.

"Brava! brava!"

The card-players stopped their game to applaud the dancers, who now leant, breathless and laughing, against the wall.

"Pist! Don Ramon, bring aguardiente! Fill your glasses, comrades!" called out the roughest of the card-players.

Ramon hastened from the stove to the dark counter, behind which wineskins bulged vaguely in the gloom.

"Money is flushed with you to-night, Don José?" he said, as he filled the glasses.

José threw back his shaggy head, bound in a scarlet handkerchief, and laughed meaningly:

"Long live Don Q., say I!"

Ramon started, and a dark look crossed his face.

"Caramba! Hold your peace, Don José! Not that name!"

José brought a gnarled hand down on his knee.

"What harm? There are no traitors here. We are all honest smugglers."

"Maybe, and maybe not," returned Ramon gloomily.

"Paquita, see how that puchero is cooking."

The girl raised the lid of the pot and stirred the contents. José sniffed appreciatively.

"It smells uncommonly good, that stew! I'll have some of it when it is cooked."

"So you shall, if *he* does not eat it all. And he is a

man of a hungry stomach," replied Ramon, pressing his lips complacently.

Every eye was turned upon him.

"He? Who?"

"He for whom I made it."

"But his name? His name?"

José rapped on the table with his knife-hilt.

Ramon hesitated, but the mountaineer swung his legs to the ground, and, coming behind the host, laid a grip upon his shoulder.

"What does this mean?" he asked fiercely.

Ramon cast a frightful eye backwards.

"There, there, Gaspar! I will tell you. It is the famous Colonel Matsado."

One of the muleteers jerked round.

"Oh, he! What? The great general who fought for us in Cuba?"

"Also the man who has recently received a great appointment in Madrid," added Gaspar threateningly.

"What does this mean, Ramon?"

"By all the saints, I know nothing but that a trooper rode up a couple of hours ago and warned me to have a good supper ready for Colonel Matsado, who is on his way to Castelleno! He will not arrive for an hour yet," Ramon explained eagerly. "But he comes with soldiers."

"But what is he coming for, this Matsado?" asked José truculently. "Does he come to shoot birds in the mountains?"

The pause that followed pointed the significance of the question. The silence was broken by a strident cackle from Gaspar.

"It takes a long gun to shoot a bird in the mountains," he remarked grimly.

"Well, as for me, I don't wish him success!" cried José. "Drink, amigos! Long live Don Q.!"

He raised his glass amidst suppressed "Vivas!"

"Peace, I tell you! Peace, friend José!" whispered Ramon angrily. "This is dangerous talk." He listened as if he heard some noise. "One never knows who knocks."

As if involuntarily, the whole party bent their heads to hearken. A sudden loud knock brought something like a panic among them, and Ramon, with a gesture of despair, sidled to the door.

"Who is there?"

A piping voice came from without, in the regular formula of answer:

"Gente de paz." Then: "It is Grulla, patron, and the wind is keen."

Ramon opened the door with an air of relief, and a scraggily built, long-nosed fellow sneaked in, and peered about him.

"Well, Grulla," inquired one of the girls, "what news?"

Grulla gained importance with the words.

"Plenty of news," he said, in his thin tones. "What do you think has happened? Robledo has been captured by the carbineers!"

Gaspar stepped forward impetuously; then, controlling himself, sank back in his corner; while a mutter of surprise and consternation went round.

"Robledo! Don Q.'s right-hand man! Is it true, Grulla?" exclaimed José.

Grulla flung out both his arms.

"Yes, on Tuesday night—in Castelleno—where he went to buy tobacco for his master's cigarillos."

He looked round with pride upon the effect he had produced. Paquita was standing with both hands pressed against her breast.

"Ay di me! It will break the heart of Lola. They love, those two—Lola and Robledo."

"Break her heart! Why should it"—he caressed his sparse whiskers and leered on the girls—"when

there are others as good to take Robledo's place?"

"You, Grulla? Why, I would rather pick up the dirtiest centimo [one-fifth of a penny] in Castelleno!" exclaimed one of the girls.

He opened his arms as if to embrace her.

"Instead of me?" he asked persuasively.

"Yes; because I could buy a cake with the farthing, but you are only fit to throw back into the gutter!"

Under cover of this talk, Ramon turned his head and muttered into Gaspar's ear:

"Here is bad news! Will you not hasten to tell my lord in the mountains?"

Gaspar emitted a sound of sour scorn.

"He has learnt of this long ago," he said. "What is there my lord does not know?"

"True, true," agreed Ramon humbly.

Grulla still held the centre of the floor, and was telling his news with unction.

"Robledo is to be executed publicly on Sunday morning, in the Plaza, because"—he glanced under his eyelids at Gaspar—"he is a brigand. And I am going to see it. There are trees in the Plaza, and I shall climb one and see everything."

"You have a bad heart, Grulla!" said José gruffly. "It may be, also, that you will have your climb for nothing."

"Do you mean that Robledo will be rescued, Don José?" asked Paquita breathlessly.

"Not this time—no, no!" declared Grulla. "The new Comandante has a tight hand. Robledo is in the strongest cell of the prison, and they watch him day and night. No one can rescue him."

Gaspar's gun-butt clattered down on the floor.

"Except one, who never forgives an injury and never deserts a friend," he remarked casually.

Grulla had somewhat lost his head on account of the unusual attention accorded to him for the sake

of his news, for ordinarily he was a negligible quantity. Therefore he dared to snigger.

"He, he, he! But this time——"

"But what this time?" burst out José. "Don Q. has been leading the brigands up there in the sierra these five years, and there's not a man would not risk his life for him."

"Nor one," Gaspar's gruff voice added—"nor one—— Listen, Grulla! Nor one who would dare to look him in the eyes!"

"That's true. So here's to the poor man's friend, naming no names," said José with a wink towards Ramon.

"You may all say what you like," grumbled Grulla, "but I will climb my tree on Sunday; and if Don Q. is wise and takes my advice——"

He stopped, struck to silence by the alteration in the countenances about him; for as he spoke the door behind him had opened softly, and a cloaked man stood in the doorway.

The men sprang to their feet; the girls drew together, and looked askance at the slender figure, which moved forward with a graceful movement of the hand by way of salutation. Grulla watched him open-mouthed, then slipped behind the women to hide.

Ramon hastened to bring one of the rough big chairs for the new-comer.

"My lord of the mountains is welcome," he murmured.

Don Q. waved him to one side; then, bending a little, he stared at the place where Grulla lay crouching behind the petticoats of the women. A sombrero covered the brigand's eyes, but Grulla's imagination made them visible as coals of fire. Without a word, Don Q. pointed an imperious finger at Grulla. At once the girls stepped back, and showed him spread-eagled in terror against the wall.

The imperious finger then pointed to the middle of the floor, and Grulla slowly dragged himself forward until he stood upon the spot indicated.

Another thirty seconds of throbbing quiet passed, then Don Q. spoke.

"I am afraid I interrupted you, Grulla. What were you about to say when I came in?"

"Let me recall your speech to your mind," went on the mellow voice. "You said: 'If Don Q. is wise and takes my advice——' What? Continue, Grulla."

"My lord——" gasped Grulla, then shut his mouth and shook his head entreatingly.

"Continue!"

"My lord, I only meant——"

Grulla's long body turned on itself as a worm turns.

"Speak!"

The word seemed to cut Grulla like a whip. With a wild start he blurted out:

"He won't spoil sport."

"Gaspar, take Grulla outside! He likes to see punishment administered. Gratify him. I will not spoil sport."

Gaspar and José sprang to the order, and hustled Grulla from the posada. The whole gathering followed, grinning, though half frightened, leaving only Ramon.

"I am afraid I have deprived you of your customers rather early, Ramon," said Don Q. to the host, who stood beside him.

"No, master, for these fellows all drink to you here."

Don Q. laughed shortly.

"Yet I believe they are more comfortable out of my sight."

"The proverb runs true, Excellency: 'In the mountains, love and fear are one.'"

"Love and fear are not one anywhere, good Ramon. For fear is an enduring quality upon which one may rely; but love, I should not warrant it to last for half-a-day. No protestations. Set wine for me!"

Ramon brought the ancient table and set wine and a glass on it beside Don Q., then went about his business, passing out through a second door at the back of the posada.

Left alone, Don Q. drank a little wine, puffed at his cigarette, and fell into an attitude of dejection. During the past weeks he had kept both Fabrique and Sebastian worried and busy; there was no want of originality in his sudden coups, his raids and reprisals. But by the capture of Robledo the other side had scored heavily; and there was no time to lose if any rescue were to be attempted, for the executive had determined upon carrying out the death penalty within two days.

Don Q. held his reputation dear, the hill people trusted him as a staunch friend who would stand by his own at any risk, and he well understood that he was now facing no ordinary danger. Sebastian was a perilous antagonist, and he and Fabrique were fighting their battle against him with something close on ferocity. But Don Q. had come down from the Valley of the Wolf bent on succouring Robledo, however desperate the chances.

While he sat turning over various plans in his mind, Gaspar entered and stood rigid at attention. Don Q. rolled and lit another cigarette.

"I am listening, Gaspar," he said at length.

"Master, there are some here who would speak with you."

Don Q. nodded, and immediately José presented himself. As a matter of fact, the goatherd was not a bad specimen of the brigand's intelligent people.

"Well, José?"

"Double patrols have been placed on the road between here and Castelleno, lest my lord take another captive. They owe you a deadly grudge, master."

"That is nothing new."

"Ay, but now they have the more reason, for an order has come down from headquarters at Madrid, that if 'Don Q. makes another prisoner both the Governor and the señor Comandante will be deprived of their appointments.'"

"Where did you hear this?" Don Q. held his cigarette suspended.

"It is true, master. I heard of it in Castelleno. For this reason they are taking special precautions." He drew one step nearer. "Master, it is dangerous for you even to be here."

Don Q. held up his hand. "Is that all you have to tell me?"

"All, master."

"Gaspar." The sinister brigand appeared at the call. "Give José his pay, and double it to-night: he has done well. Con Dois, José."

As the goatherd passed out, an old, bent woman crept in and fell at Don Q.'s feet.

"What is it, Marta?" he asked.

"Excellency, I came but to thank you. Without your help the accursed usurer Jacobo would have cast us out to die like dogs on the road! May all the saints preserve and guard you, for you are the only friend of the poor! I am old and feeble, but even to me my lord gives justice."

Before she could say more, a girl, pushing Gaspar vigorously aside, leaped into the room. She was one of the *gente de panuelo*, the people who wear handkerchiefs on their heads, as opposed to the higher class which wears the mantilla, but she was gloriously handsome as she stood panting before Don Q., half frightened and half bold.

"Gaspar would have held me back!" Her great eyes flashed angrily at the brigand by the door. "But, master, I must see you. Robledo is in prison!"

Don Q. leaning back in his chair, with one hand on his hip, watched the tears overflow on her brown cheeks.

"So I have heard, Lola."

"He is to die on Sunday!" she sobbed.

"I have heard that also."

"Master, you will not forsake him?"

"No, Lola, I shall not forsake him."

She flung herself on her knees to kiss his hand.

"What can I say? How can I thank you?"

He withdrew his hand gently. "By hastening back to Castelleno and to your work there. You still remain a servant in the house of his Excellency the Governor?"

"Yes; and, master, he makes terrible plots against your life with the señor Comandante."

"Stop!" Don Q. pondered for a moment. "Are they, then, friends—close friends—those two, Don Fabrique and Don Sebastian?"

Lola's face took on a puzzled expression. "I don't know, master, unless to be friends is to quarrel much."

"Ah! they quarrel?"

"Always. But afterwards they are always reconciled."

"The señor Comandante is then amiable?"

"No, master; no! The señor Comandante still scowls; it is his Excellency Don Fabrique who smiles well pleased when they are reconciled."

"That is interesting. Return quickly to Castelleno; and, Lola, whatever you see there, remember you must show no surprise."

After she was gone, Don Q. sat engrossed in thought for a moment. "Sebastian and Fabrique always quarreling, and always reconciled? I wonder why. For Sebastian is not to be easily reconciled . . . un-

less. . . .” He roused himself. “Now for Robledo’s affair.”

Gaspar thrust his head into the door. “The fresh horses brought by José are in the little wood. Will the master see them?”

Don Q. flung the corner of his cloak over his shoulder, as is the habit of all Spaniards who go into the night air, and followed Gaspar, meeting Ramon as he went out.

“I will return, Ramon,” he said, and disappeared into the night.

He little knew with whom he was destined to meet when that moment came.

CHAPTER XVII

AN UNWELCOME LOVER

RAMON bustled about, fanning the fire, and preparing the table for Matsado's meal, all the while muttering to himself, for though loyal enough in his adherence to Don Q., he held the innkeeper's theory of life—to stand well with every patron; and in his position it behoved him to stand especially well with the Government party. He had, he felt, cause to be uneasy at the conflict of interest which it was his business that night to reconcile. Therefore, a clatter of hoofs outside drove him to the door in a fresh access of nervousness.

But before he could reach it, it was flung open, and Sebastian entered. He looked round eagerly as if expecting to see some one.

Ramon gasped, for here was another element of difficulty brought into the situation. He recognised his morose, narrow-eyed visitor at once, for, as has been said, the Count of Lucharvo possessed an estate in the neighbourhood.

"The señor Conde is welcome. His Excellency will condescend to taste of my wine?"

Sebastian responded irritably to his greeting.

"The señorita Doña Dolores de Vayo will arrive directly from San Vicente. Her carriage horses must be fed. See that there is fodder prepared for them. Wait! Also be so good as to ask the señorita to do me the favour of seeing me here for a moment."

"Your Excellency has only to command," said

Ramon, and made off through the still open door. But he had scarcely gone when Dolores appeared.

"What has happened?" she exclaimed. "Your orderly met the carriage, and said you wished to see me. Is my father ill?"

Sebastian bowed deeply, but did not attempt the usual greeting of kissing her hand.

"He is well. Do not be alarmed. He desired me to meet you and to escort you and Doña Carlotta to Castelleno. We feared lest the brigand Don Q.——"

"I thank you, but there is no cause of fear. Don Q., whatever else he may be, is at least chivalrous; he does not capture women. Pray do not wait for us, Don Sebastian. As soon as the horses are fed, we will follow. Doña Carlotta is in the carriage. I will return to her."

"Dolores! I beg of you, don't go. Can you not spare me a few words?"

Sebastian spoke very quietly; he was imposing an immense restraint upon himself. Since the conversation of the previous morning he had brooded incessantly upon all that had passed between Dolores and himself. The whole force of his character had set so strongly in the direction of conquering her unwillingness that this fresh disappointment had shaken his self-control. A wild jealousy which he had long held hidden from her was now ready to break loose upon his tongue. He had rushed to meet her, unable to wait another hour before he taxed her with the thought that beyond any other had the power to drive him to frenzy. Yet through the past years he had been silent, keeping his doubts and wretchedness within his own heart. Not even Fabrique more than guessed the torment he had endured.

Dolores stopped reluctantly.

"If you wish it."

"In Castelleno I shall never see you alone, therefore

I must speak with you here. Don't turn away. You know already the thing I have to say."

"Please stop, Don Sebastian. We said all that could be said yesterday. Why will you persist in hurting me as well as yourself?"

"At least give me the right to teach you to love me. I could compel you to love me!"

The statement sounded like a threat in his harsh tones.

Dolores shook her head without looking at him.

"You are angry with me? My excuse is that I love you. I cannot help loving you. That makes the beginning and end of my fault. Surely it is one which a woman should forgive," he went on.

"It is not your only fault in my eyes," she said coldly.

She was very pale. This man with his selfish love had not a single regret to spend on her, although he knew that he had robbed her for years past of the peace of her home, of the affection she had once found there. Her spirit revolted at his merciless persistency; she had no conception of the jealousy which consumed him, and which had brought on this crisis of emotion.

"What other?" he asked.

"Oh, every other!" she answered impatiently. "Why should I believe in your love when I know how false your friendship could be?"

It was the touch upon his secret dread that shook his long habit of secretiveness. He looked at her strangely.

"You mean?" he questioned.

Her spirit was roused at last.

"Yes," she said; "I see you know whom I mean."

She could not bring herself to say the beloved name which had lain so long dumb upon her lips.

But the effect on Don Sebastian was beyond anything she could have imagined. His clenched fist flung up and his bloodshot eyes appalled her.

"God!" he snarled. "I could have sworn it! Cesar—Cesar is my rival still!"

She leaned one hand against the doorpost. She was breathing quickly, but she faced him without flinching. She felt as if at last she were defending her dead lover.

"Did you think it possible that I had forgotten?" she said very slowly.

Each word fell like a point of ice upon the heat of his mood.

"Yet he is dead—dead in his grave these five years, and I, Dolores, I am living, and mad for love of you!" He wanted to hurl reproach, abuse, menace at her, but his self-command was returning. "You keep him yet in your memory?"

"Yes."

"Then I envy him in his grave!"

"Ah, no!" exclaimed the girl with a quick bitterness, "for you have life, reputation, your ambitions—all that he lost."

Every word was pressing home the sting of knowledge into his consciousness—the knowledge that was the secret canker of his existence. The veins in his forehead stood out dark and knotted.

"You keep him not only in your memory, but in your heart!" he cried.

She raised her head; her eyes were like stars.

"Why should I deny it? I am as proud of loving him to-day as I was proud of loving him then!"

There was one point in the Archduke Paul's tragedy that had never reached Dolores—the fact that it was Sebastian's information that fixed suspicion on Cesar.

The man now understood how fatally his position

with her would have been damaged had she become aware of it.

"Notwithstanding his guilt!" Sebastian's excitement seemed to have passed. He watched her under lowered lids.

"I have never believed he was guilty," she said quickly.

"It was proved."

"No! He was made a victim in some terrible way—by some awful treachery!"

Sebastian turned his head towards her with a strange, stiff movement, fear like a hand was clutching at him, tightening his throat.

"What do you know?"

"Nothing, alas! nothing. But if I had been a man, his friend, what could I not have done? I should have swept the whole world to find the guilty man who betrayed him—who went free, leaving him to bear the penalty. You, Don Sebastian, you who were his friend, why did you not defend him? Why did you not take sides with him, instead of joining with his enemies? Oh, it was contemptible!"

"I tell you, I know that he was guilty. He killed the Prince, who was all but helpless. It was proved again and again. Beyond doubt or question."

"Yet I believe in him!"

"Do you think that this which you have told me to-day will make me give you up?" he began violently. "I will dare all to gain you! Yes, even though you have promised me misery and wretchedness, even though you tell me that you hate me. Yet here I swear to you that, whatever comes of it, whatever suffering, whatever curse or horror or ultimate evil, I will pay all. I am willing and ready to pay all, and much more, to hold you as my wife—to drive that man from your thoughts!"

She stood listening; not terrified any longer, but spurred to resistance, proud and defiant.

"I will die first!"

"Don't deceive yourself. You will live to make me happy. If only for a day, I shall be happy."

She shrank now before his dreadful eyes. She tried to open the door, but he seized her by the wrist roughly. He abandoned himself to the rancour of his mood.

"You shall hear me out. Yes, you will live to thank me for saving you from the shame—the shame of loving that murderer!"

She wrenched herself from his grasp.

"How dare you! How dare you! Once for all, you shall not use that word in connection with Cesar! How dare you!" Her sudden passion took him unawares. "If the loyalty to the man whose friend you once professed to be cannot hold you, then respect for me should keep you silent."

He seemed almost cowed, and stood heavily still. Then:

"I say only what I know. The man is dead. Why should I lie about him?"

"How should I know why?" she retorted furiously. "I only understand that you do lie. As for me—go from my sight! I hope I may never see you again!"

"You will not send me away!" he pleaded. "Remember your father! What shall I say to him if I return without you?"

"Anything you choose, so long as you go! At whatever cost, I will not have you near me!" She flung open the door. "Go! go! go!"

He moved a step or two, for he saw there was no gainsaying her at this moment; but he turned at the door, and looked back at her with a surly raising of the lip.

"I go. But you are not done with me. Guilty or not guilty, Cesar is dead, and I—I shall yet——"

Sebastian left the room without finishing his threat.

CHAPTER XVIII

"AFTER LONG YEARS"

DOLORRES watched the door long after it had closed behind Sebastian. Now that the stormy interview was over, the reaction followed. She flung herself into the great chair, and covered her face with her hands, but she could not banish the picture of Sebastian's face. A sense of her own weakness and isolation crushed her. She had held out against this hateful demand for five years, but she had not even yet been able to rid herself of his persecutions.

His chief allies were those of her own family; for General de Vayo, like many another Spaniard, found it impossible to forgive disobedience in his own household, and was bitterly determined to drive her to submission.

The future was not blank, but dark with the horror of what she might be forced to do. Her loathing of Sebastian had grown and intensified beyond all limit during the last half-hour. And yet they might be too strong for her in the end; for she had no one to help her—no one to turn to.

She rocked herself to and fro, overwhelmed by the knowledge of her loneliness. A fear of that which the future might hold for her rose darkly on her thoughts. Since her girlhood she had been thrown back upon herself, and self-communing had made her very clear-sighted. Most of all she feared herself, lest in some weak hour, weary of the unending struggle, she might consent to become Sebastian's wife. She

knew fatally well in how many ways a woman may be influenced in her home.

Carlotta was one of those surface-natured women that no argument can tire out. Day by day she would continue to press her plea that Dolores should sacrifice herself for her father; that since Cesar was dead, nothing could hurt him any more; that it was useless to refuse a lover who would not accept defeat. She sat there tearless, confronting dread. Dread of the weak hour which comes to all of us, when the battle seems beyond our powers, when the secret of resistance escapes for one fatal moment from the failing hand. Unconsciously she whispered aloud:

"What shall I do? If I had any one to turn to—any one to help me!"

In spite of the hackneyed proverb, and in face of the experience common to all men and women who observe the courses of life, the likelihood that certain human threads once woven into a close pattern, then parted, should tend to come together again, is derided. Yet, that this happens perpetually under our eyes, and is no matter for wonder, but an ordinary fact of life, remains unassailably true. Call it coincidence, or what you will; but atoms once drawn intimately together by some unknown social law appear to retain their mutual power of attraction.

Thus the four persons most nearly connected with the event of that ominous January night were drifting into touch once more.

Don Q. made preparations for his ride into Castelleno, and in consequence of information given him by Gaspar had formulated a plan for reaching Robledo, which, wild as it was, might be successful. As he returned towards the posado, Sebastian, leaving it, called to his escort of carbineers and trotted away by the road to Castelleno.

It was too dark for Don Q. to distinguish who the

officer might be; but warned by the shadow of the carriage, with its feeding horses, looming large in front of the posada, he passed round the little building and opened the second door noiselessly.

There was no mistaking the girl who sat, with her face covered, in the glare of the oil lamp, rocking to and fro with tearless sobs. The sight of Dolores in her grief wiped his mind clear of every other thought. He closed the door behind him, and stood in a tumult of feeling watching her.

She heard nothing; but a moment later her hands fell to her lap, and she saw him. It must be remembered that she was in a mood of nervous exaltation, and while she looked with wide, deepening eyes, her heart misgave her. By the strength of her misery, of her longing for Cesar's presence, she called him from his rest?

Tremors shook her from head to foot, but she would not give way to her fears. She must speak to him, and perhaps hear his dear voice once more. She stretched out her clasped hands.

"Cesar," she said, in a throbbing whisper, "have you come back, even from your grave, to comfort me?"

The pitiful appeal in its simpleness struck at his heart. In the same instant he was kneeling beside her, holding the two small, cold, clasping hands between his own, and pressing them to his breast.

"Dear, dear! It is I myself—Cesar—who loves you!"

She looked at him wildly.

"Cesar!" she almost screamed, and fell into hysterical weeping.

He soothed her and talked to her as one soothes a child, and in the broken interchange of words how much was said and how much understood it is impossible to write down. He learned how it was that no

message had reached him through Tobal, and she understood the old servant's subterfuge, who, by pretending to recognise the body found after the flood as that of his master, had so admirably covered Don Cesar's escape.

"But you left me to mourn for you as dead all these years! It was cruel, Cesar!" she reproached him. The words brought him back to himself and the true situation between them. He put away her hands, gently, and stood up.

"Dead? Because so I was and am!" For the first time she heard the new, hard ring in his voice.

"Dead, yes, to your enemies, but not to me! Could you not trust me?"

A gleam of suspicion shot across his face.

"Trust you? Was it easy to do so when constant rumours of your marriage with Sebastian reached me even in my hiding?"

She met his eyes steadily.

"Yes, for you knew me. And I was not to blame for the rumours."

There was no softening in his expression.

"Who was it left you a moment ago before I came in? Dolores, was not that Sebastian?"

"Yes," she said again. And her tears rose and overflowed.

"And he still desires you for his wife?" the hard voice went on.

"Yes. But you have no cause to be angry."

"And you have even thought of consenting?" the sharp question flashed out.

"I—I feared they might drive me to it at last."

"So that was your faithfulness!" He flung away from her.

"You don't understand! Cesar, you must hear me out. Ever since that night when I believed you died, they have been urging me, forcing me in a

thousand ways to marry him. I hated him, it would kill me to be his wife; but no one considered that—no one cared!”

“Who urged you? Carlotta and your father?”

“Yes, yes. There are so many ways in which a woman may be compelled! They talked and persuaded and importuned me. Worse than all, there was Don Sebastian with his hateful courtesies. For all these five years I have held out against them. I have refused him. I have repulsed him. But my father has never ceased to be angry. He seldom speaks to me. I have been wretched and lonely and broken all these years!”

He was at her side again.

“Forgive me! My poor Dolores!”

“They have besieged me, wearied me beyond endurance. I feared that some day I might give in; some day when I was spent with opposition, in a moment of weakness, I might be beaten at last. It was horror to think of it!”

“I understand.”

“As you entered, I was wishing that I could die and escape them. I felt so utterly miserable that I imagined at first it was your spirit come back to comfort me. And, instead, it was you, you! Your own living self!”

“Then I am glad I came, in spite of——”

But she went on, unheeding, sure of her new happiness.

“I was telling myself that I had but one friend”—she laughed softly—“one man in all Spain who had helped me and to whom I owe gratitude. Can you guess who it was?”

Cesar awoke as if from a reverie. He could not gaze enough at her dear face.

“Who is he? I will seek him out, thank him, reward him if it be in my power.”

"He does not even know of my existence, yet he has befriended me." She smiled.

"But his name?"

"Don Q."

"Don Q.!" he repeated, with a strange accent. "What do you know of him?"

"Nothing, except that he has kept Don Sebastian so busy during the last weeks that I have had an interval of peace at San Vicente. He may be a brigand, but I have prayed for that man, Cesar."

"You have prayed for Don Q.! Thank God!"

"Yes; and I have even wished him luck."

Cesar smiled. "Perhaps that accounts for his good fortune. But——"

He made a quick gesture, as of a man throwing off a burden. "The problem of Don Q. does not concern us for the moment. My chief aim must be to make sure that Sebastian shall trouble you no more."

"It cannot matter now. I have no fear of him any longer. But before I go, tell me something of your life. Where have you been? How have you lived since that night?" she asked.

"There is not much to tell you. I have passed from hiding-place to hiding-place. I have spent my life watching and waiting, unable to show my face in any town of Spain, lest some one who knew me in my old life should recognise and denounce me."

"You have been near me—in Spain all the time! Ah, why did you not come to me?"

"Perhaps it is the one thing I have to be proud of during these years, that I had the strength to keep away from you," he answered sadly. "It was better that you should think me dead."

"Ah, no! But would it not have been safer, wiser for you to leave the country? How could you run the terrible risk of remaining?"

"I have remained in Spain because the men whom

I must watch here in Spain. I have cared only for one thing. I have had only one desire to keep me alive, and that is to establish my innocence. I am still waiting to come at the truth."

She looked at him, reading his face.

"But you guess something?" she said, with certainty. "You have already found out something?"

"No; I only suspect. I suspect the identity of the man who knows the truth—whatever it is."

"Tell me his name?" she cried. "I may be able to help you."

"Fabrique de Borusta."

"The new Governor of Castelleno!" She started. "I remember you saw him that evening in the corridor! Oh, did he *kill* the Archduke?"

"No; it could never have been Fabrique himself. But one thing I am sure of—that he saw the deed done. When I met him in the corridor, I am certain that he came straight from the ante-room where the Archduke then lay dead. Yet when I asked for his evidence and your father questioned him he denied having met me—denied having been there."

"Why? Why should he not have helped you?"

"The reason may have been that I had quarrelled with him, and he was not sorry to find a way to revenge himself so well."

"It is terrible to think of! The treachery, the vileress of it! But, Cesar, when I go down to Castelleno, I will tax Don Fabrique with his denial. I will——" Her lovely, earnest face was raised to his, and in the promise of her shining eyes he stayed the hunger of his heart. She was ready to fight against the world with him.

"No, dear, no," he answered tenderly; "it would be useless. Fabrique would only meet your questions with equivocation."

"But I could judge by his looks if he knew anything."

"No, darling; it would serve to put him on his guard. It is I, and not you, who must deal with Fabrique. I have been long waiting for the opportunity. When it comes I shall find means to get at the truth."

"But you forget," she exclaimed in alarm, "he will be sure to recognise you."

Cesar smiled faintly.

"If we were alone together in the mountains I should ask nothing better!"

"I am certain that you already know who killed the Prince," she said, divining his look.

"I have not the smallest proof."

"But you will tell me?"

He paused. In spite of himself, her sympathy, her presence, her joyous certainty of the future influenced him. He was cheered, inspirited. But he knew that he must not share his suspicions with her yet.

"Wait but a little longer, Dolores. At present I know nothing positively. When I hold proofs, then you shall learn everything."

Rapid question and answer had, up to this moment, passed between them, for both felt that the time together must necessarily be short. But now a pause came, filled with a long look which brought to each of them a strange sense of physical strengthening.

Those who have been long tried will know what this means. Not till then did Cesar realise how he had been consumed with desire for the mere sight of her. He found her more beautiful than even he had pictured her in his memory, more beautiful in her pallor, and the new sad droop of the lips. The significance of her splendid loyalty, of all that she had suffered for his sake, of her unshaken love, beat in upon his mind.

"Dolores, I cannot speak all that I would say," he began at last haltingly. "I could never tell you one half of what I feel. Your faith in me in spite of everything——" He broke down. "No; I cannot find words. You are far beyond them. I could worship you!"

"What else was possible when I loved you?" she responded gaily.

Her smile pierced him.

"It has cost you dear; I cannot think of it," he faltered.

"But, Cesar, my worst sorrow is gone now that I know you live, and——" She waited with a sweet coquetry for him to finish.

"God knows I love you," he said desperately. "Dolores, whatever happens, whatever comes in the future, whatever miserable mistakes you may hear that I have made, remember that, through all my love for you, the thought of you possessed me! You were my single solace."

She put her hands upon his shoulders.

"Dear, the time may soon come when you can clear your name and prove yourself innocent, then we shall forget sorrow. Think of it, Cesar! All our old happiness will return. The past will be like a dream, just a dreadful dream—and you and I will be together. We will be happy as we used to be."

He could not bear her hopeful words. He took the clinging fingers, and kneeling down before her, pressed them against his forehead, his lips. "Oh, if I had only known in time!" he moaned to himself. "And this is what I have forefeited!"

She bent over him.

"You are grieving for me? There is no need. I am the happiest woman on earth now."

And he was thinking what change would come upon her when she knew that at her knees knelt

that Don Q. whose name was notorious throughout the province! Cesar raised his thin, bronzed, altered face. He could not stop the question on his lips.

"Supposing I were Don Q.—could you love me still?"

She smiled tenderly, and her starlike eyes told of their innocent faith in him.

"Cesar! Why does it please you to try me?"

Perhaps he would have told her all then, had time been given them, for bitterly he felt that, though she had been able to cling to Cesar de Lutoleale through good and evil report, she might look with disillusioned regard upon the outlaw, Don Q. But a sound of approaching voices warned them. He kissed her hungrily. "I must not be found with you," he whispered.

"But when shall I see you again?"

"Perhaps soon. I have a plan——" And he disappeared into the deep shadows at the farther end of the posada.

Ramon entered, bowing deeply.

"The carriage is ready, Excellency."

And she passed out.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW COLONEL MATSADO SUPPED

RAMON stood at the door while the wheels of the carriage crunched away on the Castelleno road. But almost before they had gone beyond earshot, another sound from another direction came on the night wind. Listening eagerly, he made out the jingle of chain-bits and accoutrements mingled with the trampling of cantering hoofs. He turned quickly on his heel, for this assuredly meant the arrival of Colonel Matsado. But as he turned he uttered a loud exclamation, for sitting comfortably by the stove was Don Q.

"Master, you must escape, immediately! A party of troopers are riding up the hill from the San Vicente road."

Don Q. looked at him, and sent a long column of smoke to the ceiling by way of reply.

"Lord, it is Colonel Matsado! You know why he comes," urged Ramon apprehensively.

A second column of smoke shot up.

"Master, it is dangerous for you and—for me!"

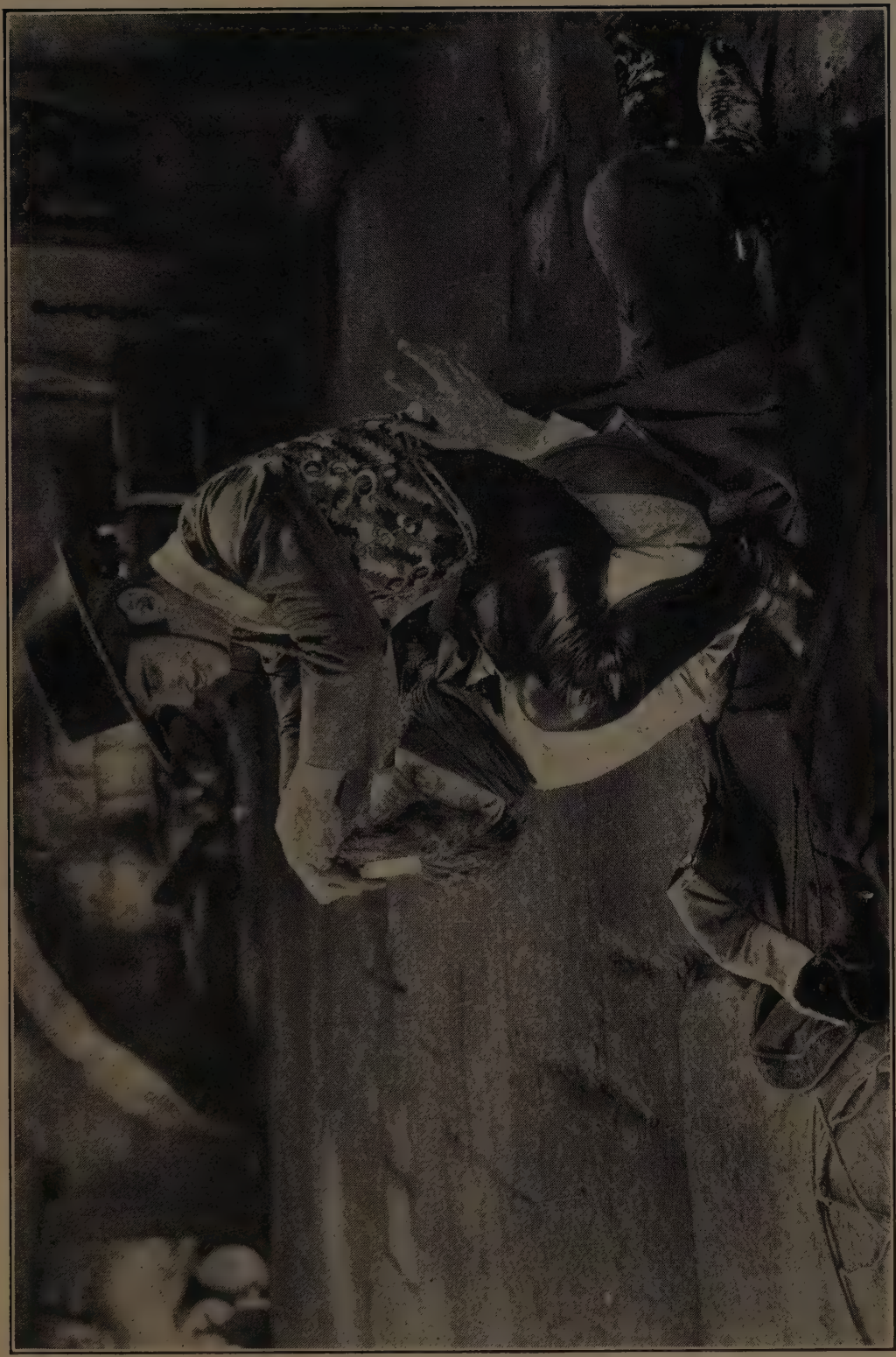
At last Don Q. spoke.

"Why did you not warn me earlier that you expected him?"

"Gaspar heard of it, lord."

"Luckily, yes." Don Q. finished his cigarette and flung the end into the stove. "Now obey me."

"Master, the troopers with the señor colonel are



Scene from Douglas Fairbanks' Photoplay, "Don Q, Son of Zorro."

A FLASH OF THE WHIP, A FEW DEFT TWISTS AND MATSADO WAS
GAGGED AND HELPLESS.

Don Q's Love Story.

almost at the door!" wailed Ramon; "and I have no room but this. No other," repeated the host in a frenzy of illustrative gestures.

"Then show him into it."

"But, master, Colonel Matsado sent orders that he should be here alone—that every one else should be excluded, and that I was to make ready a good supper."

Don Q. stood alert. His sombre mood was gone, for he had just received the hint he had been waiting for.

"Excellent! Supper? What have you in the house?"

"Only the bread and fowl which you see upon the table, lord, and a puchero, to make which I killed Paquita's little white kid. Not much, but it is good."

"I don't doubt it." Don Q. clapped his hands sharply. "Gaspar, make haste!"

"Master!"

The brigand's ugly head appeared.

"Quick! Take the horses to the back of the house, and bring me my saddle-bags."

A minute later, amid the outcries and entreaties of Ramon, Don Q. was packing away the cold fowl and bread into his saddle-bags.

"Now for the puchero. It is cooking in that pot. Gaspar, carry out that pot."

"Excellency, have pity on me! I have nothing else! I am but a poor man, and the señor colonel will be very wroth."

"They are close by. Now, Ramon, do exactly as I tell you. When Colonel Matsado arrives, you will say that you have no provisions." Don Q. laughed shortly. "And it will be quite true."

"But, Excellency," persisted Ramon, following Don Q., as he moved towards the door at the back

of the house, "he sent me notice, the señor colonel, he ordered the trooper to say that he had a large appetite—that he was a hungry man."

"So much the better."

Ramon threw up his hands in a despairing appeal to heaven.

"I will obey you, master, but I'll have to suffer for it."

Don Q. stopped short and turned on the man.

"Has any person ever suffered by obeying my orders?" he asked, in a harsh voice.

"No, no, master!"

"Very well. Do as I tell you, and you shall not suffer for it. If the señor colonel asks for wine, give him of your worst! You understand?" he said, as he left the room.

Ramon threw out his arms at full stretch and shook his face towards the hollow of the roof, with an agony of protest. What would come of these mad orders? He could not say, but he occupied the short moment before the troopers clattered up to the door in placing a flask of his poorest wine upon the table.

"Is this the posada de la Hermandad?" asked a strident voice without. And Ramon hurried forward with many bows to meet a tallish man in dark uniform, with a stiff military carriage. His face was square, a black patch covered one eye, and the compressed corners of his mouth told of a despotic temper.

"I lay my house and all that I have at the feet of your Excellency," babbled Ramon in a panic of volubility. "Will your Excellency honour me by resting here? Will your Excellency——"

Matsado sat down and brought one hand open upon the table with a slight bang, which had the effect of stiffening Ramon's tongue. A sergeant

stood waiting for orders in the doorway, and Ramon, with a true hillman's horror of uniforms, wished himself dead once for all, especially when he found Matsado's single eye fixed upon him.

"Do you know who I am?"

"Excellency, yes." Ramon bowed again. "The great señor Colonel Matsado, who won so many famous victories in Cuba."

"You are right; and it will be much better for you if you will tell me the whole truth. Come, how often has that rascal, Don Q., been in this house? Answer me that."

Ramon's face took on the expression of shocked horror which was all the more convincing because of the real panic the question caused in his mind.

"Never, never, señor colonel! I swear it!"

Matsado grunted incredulously.

"When was he here last?" he asked, with an abruptness like the snap of a dog, which characterised all his talk.

Ramon fell back in consternation. For a moment all Don Q.'s design hung in the balance of this big fellow's quaking heart. All must have been betrayed had not Ramon shared the general belief that Don Q. had ears to hear and eyes to see everything he chose to know. Frightened as he was of Matsado, and although he had never met with any but just treatment from the brigand, he yielded at the crisis to the authority which appealed to his imagination rather than that which held the raw facts of arrest and prison before his face.

"He hides in the gorges up above there," he answered. "But, Excellency, how can he come here when the road by my house is safe and patrolled by troopers day and night?"

"There may be something in that," growled Matsado. "But keep in mind, fellow, that I see

more with my one eye than other men with two. Sergeant!"

The Sergeant saluted.

"Let the men bivouac on the spot I pointed out. And see that they look a little smarter before we start in the morning. Go; but return for my final orders before you sleep." He drew up to the little table as the sergeant closed the door. "Now, then, host, supper—supper!"

Ramon in his heart called movingly on his patron saint for aid before he began in a shaking voice: "The señor colonel——" Then he pointed helplessly at the table.

"Caramba! Have you never seen a hungry man before? Food! Bring me food!"

"We be poor folk up here in the mountain district, señor colonel," went on Ramon, in feeble apology.

"I know all that! However, give me of your best. I see the table, but I don't yet see your best fare."

"Pardon, Excellency, my best fare *is* upon the table."

The words came out with a rush.

Matsado's temper was not soothed by hunger.

"But there is nothing upon it!" he roared. "Santiago, what do you mean?"

"It is not my fault," declared Ramon, with abject sincerity.

"But I sent you notice of my coming! I ordered you to get provisions! A forty-mile ride, and starvation at the end of it!" He banged a knife-hilt on the table. "You lazy scoundrel! Bring me some wine at least!"

Ramon opened the flash with fumbling fingers. He dreaded the outburst of rage which was inevitable, yet his Spanish pride was beginning to chafe under

Matsado's roughness, so that it was not without a sly hint of malice that he poured out wine into the glass, with a humble: "My best, Excellency."

Matsado tasted it, and spat it out furiously.

"You confounded scoundrel! What vile stuff is this? Even a beggarly place like your posada should be able to supply good country wine, not ink! You shall be sorry yet!" he shouted. Then stopped to listen.

A strong knocking sounded on the door.

"See who it is!" ordered Matsado. "Allow no one to come in!"

Ramon threw back the door, and the angry colonel caught a glimpse of a traveller muffled in his cloak, with his horse's head at his shoulder, showing dimly in the darkness of the night outside.

"What is your desire, caballero?" inquired Ramon.

"Why, shelter and a good supper, patron," answered Don Q.'s voice courteously.

Ramon experienced a thrill of relief. Here was one fitted to take over all the difficulties of the situation. But he acted his part.

"You cannot have either here to-night, caballero," he replied.

"Then I fear I must insist," said Don Q. "I have ridden a long way."

Matsado half turned at this, and made a warning gesture at Ramon.

"No, no. Tell him no!"

"I cannot give you supper, caballero, for I have no food in the house."

"Fortunately that does not matter. You can, at any rate, provide me with a roof, and I can provide myself with a supper."

"You cannot enter, señor; you must eat your supper elsewhere."

Don Q. made no attempt to enter, but he called

"Gaspar, bring my saddle-bags and the wine. By your leave, or without it, patron, I shall eat my supper in your house," he said quietly, and stepped over the threshold.

Matsado sprang to his feet.

"But I say no, sir! This inn is engaged." Don Q. bowed ceremoniously.

"You are also a traveller, sir," he said, "and you will not, I feel sure, refuse me half-an-hour here in which to enjoy the cold fowl, the olives, the little salad, and the bottle of admirable wine which I have brought with me."

All Cesar de Lutoleale's old charm of manner was there, but it affected the colonel not in the least; yet he began to look doubtful.

"Bread—a plump fowl—olives—a handful of succulent salad," repeated Don Q. slowly, so that each item might soak invitingly into Matsado's consciousness.

Matsado hesitated, then spoke civilly.

"I have been hasty, caballero. I cannot condemn you to fast any longer. Here is a table ready," he ended, with some grimness.

"Accept my profoundest thanks, señor general," said Don Q., as if perceiving Matsado's uniform for the first time. "Gaspar, place my supper upon the table." And as Gaspar, laid one article after another in view, he added: "I should have ventured to invite you to join me"—he looked at Matsado—"but no doubt you have already dined?"

Matsado could not stifle a certain significance in his reply.

"You are too good, sir. I have not dined—that is, not recently."

"Then, if I may be so far honoured——" Don Q. pointed to the table. "Gaspar, bring another chair."

Matsado accepted with urbanity.

"Before becoming your guest," he said, "may I acquaint you with my name? I am Colonel Matsado."

Don Q.'s smile of pleasurable surprise was not lost upon Matsado.

"What! Colonel Matsado? *The Matsado of Cuban fame?*"

The other answered with a gruff complacency. "I know of no other in his gracious Majesty's service."

Don Q. expressed himself to be overwhelmed with the honour of entertaining so distinguished a personage, and the supper occupied them busily for some time.

"Really, caballero, this is—*was*—a jewel of a fowl!" exclaimed Matsado, in good humour. "And the wine! Madre de Dios!"

"Gaspar, fill his Excellency's glass. Do you reside in this part of the country, colonel?"

"No; I am here merely on an affair of some importance. I rode from a station down the line to investigate a little in person——" He stopped himself. "To-morrow morning, I go to Castelleno to stay with the Governor. I have sent on a trooper to apprise him of my coming."

"Ah, you will stay with Don Fabrique? A charming fellow—especially to the ladies! Do you already know him?"

"No; I have not yet met him. But I am acquainted with Count Sebastian, who is his colleague in Castelleno. I have spent the best years of my life in Cuba, and have few friends left in Spain. In fact, with the exception of Don Sebastian, I do not suppose I have another acquaintance in this province. All the better, perhaps, for the work I come to do."

"You are not, then, taking a well-earned rest?" inquired Don Q., signing to Gaspar to open another bottle.

"Far from it. I—may I ask if you are also bound for Castelleno?"

Don Q., who had reason to be pleased with much he had just heard, smiled.

"I hope to be in that town to-morrow."

"Then no doubt I shall have the pleasure of meeting you there?" said Matsado.

"Ah, mine will be only a flying visit. But circumstances may arise to detain me—one never knows. In that case, I have not the smallest doubt of our meeting. Yet another glass, I implore you, colonel."

By this time Gaspar had cleared the table. Ramon had long before been sent by Don Q. to find fodder for the horses of himself and his servant.

But Matsado shook his head.

"I must remember that I have to be in the saddle with the dawn. May I ask to whom I owe thanks for this most acceptable hospitality?"

Don Q. took out a paper.

"Your sergeant would not let me pass without examining this," he said, laying it on the table.

It was a *cedula* such as every traveller carries, and Matsado glanced over it keenly.

"I am much obliged, Don Ignatio," he said, using the name on the passport.

"You will hear of me in Castelleno," returned Don Q., as if to clinch his identity. "Don Sebastian and Don Fabrique both know me well. Here is some excellent tobacco, colonel. Do me the honour of trying it."

Matsado rolled a cigarette thoughtfully. The man opposite was undoubtedly of the noble class. Both his speech and his manner declared it. Perhaps he might be able to glean a few useful details from him.

"By the way, do you travel much through this district?" he asked.

Don Q. glanced at Gaspar.

"Quite often."

"You surprise me. I heard that desperado Don Q. had made the neighbourhood unsafe."

"He has never attacked me," said Don Q. gravely. "Besides, the authorities are taking extraordinary measures to suppress his outbreaks just now."

"It is true, yet he seems able to defy the people at Castelleno. But we shall soon rid the countryside of him. It is preposterous that he should have been allowed to live, and, far more than that, to flourish for years in the teeth of the law. But it will not be for long. My experience in Cuba will help me to deal with him. I see more with my one eye, Don Ignatio, believe me, than other men with two!"

"I can well imagine it," said the other flatteringly.

"Yes, we shall hunt Don Q. down—like a wolf!"

Don Q. had raised his eyes to Gaspar at this last speech, and scarcely was it out of Matsado's mouth when two hands from behind closed upon his throat, and to his amazement his urbane entertainer of a moment ago rose to thrust the straw cover of the flask gag-wise between his teeth. He struggled violently, but he had to deal with two men, each as strong as himself, and before he realised it he lay helpless on the ground.

"You are wondering what all this may mean, colonel," said Don Q. "It means that you came to catch the wolf, and, to put it badly, the wolf has caught you. Now, the wolf must ask you for the loan of your coat." This cost a further struggle but it was soon over. "Your hat, your cloak, your pistols, your boots, your spurs, and, last of all—a thousand pardons, colonel." He plunged his hand

into the coat which he had slipped on. "Ah, here are your credentials from Madrid. Good!"

Matsado made violent efforts to speak.

"I can guess what you would say," went on Don Q., as he turned himself into an excellent imitation of the Special Commissioner. "But, as I told you, I have business at Castelleno, and since I cannot show myself there in my own character, I am forced to borrow yours." With this, the eye-patch was transferred to the brigand's eye. "I trust I shall do you credit, colonel. Now we will lift you gently and hide you safely away among the wineskins."

This had hardly been done when a knocking at the door warned them of the return of the sergeant.

"Get out of sight, Gaspar!"

As the man dipped behind the counter, Don Q., with the military cloak round him, stretched himself on a bench by the wall. There being no response to a second knocking the sergeant opened the door cautiously, and peeped in. A slight snore from Don Q. drew his eyes to the bench. He could see the long military boots of Matsado, and ventured to cough.

Matsado heard an excellent imitation of his own harsh voice ask: "What d'ye want?"

"You told me to come for orders, sir," replied the sergeant.

Don Q. yawned audibly. "Not-to-be-disturbed-to-morrow-morning-till-I-call," was the sleepy reply, as the figure in the cloak settled to sleep again.

The sergeant saluted and went out. A moment later Don Q. and Gaspar slipped silently through the farther door, and were galloping towards Castelleno.

CHAPTER XX

WHEN THIEVES FALL OUT

ON the following afternoon the sun had begun to slant over the pretty white town of Castelleno. Against the sea-wall the blue water sparkled and ruffled under a rising breeze until the masts of the long string of vessels by the Trocadero swayed at every angle against the deep hues of the horizon. Beyond them, like gaily clad dancers, pleasure-boats and fishing-boats dipped and curtsied, but the broad tree-bordered Paseo was still empty, waiting for the stream of people who would presently come to drive and loiter there in the cool airs of evening.

In a shaded room near the centre of the town Don Fabrique was enjoying his siesta, for it was yet October, and the heat at midday rendered such a rest particularly agreeable to the Governor. The jalousies were drawn, and it seemed but a short time since he had shut his eyes when he was disturbed by a voice from the adjoining room, which he used as a private office.

"Excellency, Excellency! It is time to awake. I have brought your iced milk."

"Yes, yes, in a little while, Lola," he answered sleepily.

The girl placed the tray, which held a glass of milk thickened with crushed almonds, and a letter on the office table. Then she took up the letter and fingered it anxiously.

"It is from the señorita. She promised me she

would plead for Robledo. Ay di me, there is the clock striking! I wonder if he hears it in his prison?" Dropping the letter, she ran to the window, from which she gazed across the arid spaces of the Plaza to a high building opposite.

She was a pretty girl, and a crimson flower coquettishly fastened in her hair accentuated her Southern beauty. But for the moment her very real trouble had drained all thoughts of vanity from her mind.

"It may be the last day he has to live!" she murmured, with a rush of tears; but she dried them quickly, for none in that house must ever know that Robledo was her husband.

Fabrique kicked open the door and entered, yawning explosively. He took up the milk and swallowed it, while the girl looked at his stout back with disfavour. He was now become a man of unwieldy girth, sleeker than of old, and with a more assured manner, which only slipped from him at moments of stress. He laid down the glass and began to stretch his arms, but stopped midway to rub crossly at his forehead and neck.

"The mosquitoes attacked me while I have been dozing," he said. "Have the goodness, Lola, to see that none remain under the net to-morrow."

"Assuredly, Excellency. They bite, those little monsters!" she said with feigned sympathy. Then, unable to control her impatience, she pointed out the letter.

Fabrique, with a glance at the writing, opened it hastily.

"Ah, ah!" he read aloud. "The señorita Doña Dolores de Vayo wishes to know if his Excellency the Governor can see her this afternoon. She will call, and begs him to spare her a few minutes. Certainly his Excellency can spare her as many minutes as she pleases. She is beautiful."

"And it is already about the hour when the ladies drive out," hinted Lola.

"True. I must make a careful toilet to receive so beautiful a woman; and her duenna Doña Carlotta is also comely." He hurried from the room, calling out: "Wait, Lola, wait! Open the jalousies and the door to the patio. I will receive the señorita there."

Lola carried out his orders, and in a few minutes he returned, a hand-mirror in one hand and caressing his neck with the other.

"See, Lola, these mosquito bites? How do they look?"

Lola shook her head, laughing to herself.

"They appear very red, Excellency."

"I will powder them. That will improve matters." He disappeared again. "Come, that appears better, hein?"

"Much better, Excellency."

Fabrique settled his coat about his hips, pulled the collar that held his fleshy neck enclosed, and sighed.

"They are tight, these collars; yet one must look well. Brush my coat, Lola."

As she brushed it, she said slyly:

"Your Excellency is fortunate. All the prettiest ladies smile at you."

Fabrique by this time was examining himself at a mirror which hung beside his office table. He turned, smiling fatuously.

"Do they? Have you perceived it, Lola? Well, perhaps they do." Then, as if struck by an unpleasant thought: "Any other letters?" he asked.

"None, Excellency."

"Any messages?"

"No, Excellency; nothing but the letter I have given you."

"Thank the saints for that!" He sat down with an air of sincere relief.

Lola was like other Spanish servants—she chatted freely.

"For what, Excellency?" she inquired.

Neither of them saw Don Sebastian, who, making his way through the giant geraniums and heliotropes and the various semi-tropical blooms and trees which adorned the patio, had mounted the steps and entered the room as Fabrique replied:

"Why, that for two whole hours I have not heard the name of that pestilent brigand Don Q.!"

Sebastian strode into the middle of the big, shady apartment. Lola cast one terrified look at his scowling face, and fled by the nearest door.

"Will you never get over the habit, Fabrique, of making your servants your confidantes?" he asked angrily. "At the present moment nothing could be more foolish."

Fabrique had started on the appearance of his colleague like a child found out in some naughty trick, but he regained his self-possession in a moment.

"In my opinion, Sebastian, Lola is an excellent creature, and it is quite possible I might be able to discover, through her, information such as only circulates in the kitchens of a house, and could not otherwise reach our ears."

Sebastian's only reply was a contemptuous ejaculation.

"I have come to make the final arrangements for the execution of the man Robledo. I can prove that he was concerned with Don Q. in that affair at Zurcanez."

"Was not that the occasion, Sebastian, on which Don Q. almost captured you?" He peered up at the Comandante's irritable face. "As to Robledo, do you

know, I thought I detected a sneer in his manner of answering when you cross-examined him."

Don Sebastian sat down at the opposite side of the office table with an air of suppressed exasperation, which Fabrique enjoyed as the strongest admission of his power, for Sebastian was notoriously irascible.

"He will sneer his last at eight o'clock to-morrow morning," he said. "I am ready to countersign the death-warrant." He dashed his signature on the document Fabrique pushed across to him. "There's another nail in Don Q.'s coffin."

Fabrique carefully blotted the signature.

"If you take my advice, Sebastian, when you come to bury that coffin, you will first make quite sure that Don Q. is inside it!"

"I think you may trust me for that," said the other, rising brusquely.

Fabrique's eternal "Sebastian," with its rising inflection on the last syllable, was becoming well-nigh unbearable. He paced the floor for a moment to recover patience.

"We have the whole power of the State behind us, while he relies on a handful of wolfish followers lurking in caves in the sierra."

"Yet he and his wolfish followers have defied the whole power of the State for years, Sebastian, haven't they? Can you account for that?"

"Easily! My predecessors in the military command here were not strong men. They were afraid to act. Have I not done more in three months than all the others in twice the number of years? Don Q. is hard pushed now; he cannot hold out much longer. We must take him in another week or two."

But Fabrique was not to be persuaded.

"Still, I can't help wishing that we had him laid by the heels, under lock and key. Especially since we

received that disagreeable hint from Madrid which concerns both you and me, Sebastian."

Don Sebastian's hands itched to choke the name back into the fat man's throat.

"What are you talking about?"

"I am merely reminding you that if Don Q. takes another captive we shall lose our appointments."

"There is no fear of that. I have made it too dangerous for him."

"He is a tiger, Sebastian; a veritable tiger. He may escape you." A clatter of hoofs in the Plaza came through the open window. "Who—what is that?" stammered Fabrique.

Don Sebastian laughed.

"You have allowed Don Q. to get on your nerves, Fabrique. Did you imagine he was coming here?"

Fabrique wiped his damp forehead.

"No, no; he would not dare that. But——"

A servant carrying a large official letter entered through the house door.

"A trooper has just brought this, Excellency."

Fabrique took the envelope, and hearing there was no answer, dismissed the man before he read the sheet aloud. It announced the coming of Matsado, the Special Commissioner, who was being sent from headquarters to investigate the affair of Don Q., with which the local authorities seemed unable to deal.

"Oh, Sebastian!" commented Fabrique in dismay.

Sebastian swore between his teeth.

"Why can't they leave us to settle the business alone, instead of sending this infernal Matsado to meddle? I know him! A loud, one-eyed fellow! He is coming to take all the credit, just as I had cornered Don Q. When does the fellow arrive?"

"Within the hour. You will remain here to receive him?"

"Naturally. He will be shown that we are using

stringent measures. The execution of Robledo, for example."

Fabrique, in placing the death-warrant in a prominent position to catch Matsado's eye, remembered the note he had received from Dolores, and mentioned it.

"What? From Doña Dolores?" exclaimed Sebastian. What can she want with you?"

Fabrique bridled a little.

"We shall see when she comes. In the meantime, am I to congratulate you upon your approaching marriage?"

Sebastian walked the floor of the patio, and stood with his back to Fabrique.

"No, not yet. She does not grow less perverse; but, once married, I shall change all that!"

Fabrique watched the twitch of the other man's shoulders with a malicious amusement.

"Sebastian! Sebastian!" he said.

"Well, well?"

"I feel I ought to tell you that your chance of doing so does not appear to me particularly hopeful."

"It is very kind of you to mention it. Pray, why not?"

Fabrique stretched out his plump legs reflectively.

"It has occasionally struck me, Sebastian, that Doña Dolores still remembers Don Cesar."

He fixed a keen eye on his companion's back.

"Bah! He has been dead these five years," returned Sebastian, with a forced levity.

"Still, Cesar was not a man likely to be forgotten."

Sebastian could bear no more of this galling talk. He wheeled round on Fabrique. "Have I not yet heard the last of him?" he said fiercely. "Surely I have stopped your mouth! That night's work has cost me a fortune!"

Fabrique cowered under the angry force of the figure leaning over him.

"And a confession. Don't forget the confession, Sebastian!" he retorted spitefully. "I have kept it very securely, believe me."

Sebastian flung across the room.

"I must have been mad when I wrote it!"

Fabrique fumbled for an instant at an inner pocket, but snatched his hand out before Sebastian turned.

"You could not help writing it, Sebastian, for I was obliged to insist upon your doing so. Had you refused, I should have felt it imperative to reveal all that I knew. But no one shall ever see that letter as long as you treat me liberally, Sebastian," he ended plaintively.

"Caramba! when I think how you have bled me!" He suddenly laid his hand on Fabrique's collar and shook him. "If ever you betray me, you will find me a more dangerous enemy than Don Q."

"Sebastian! Sebastian!" whimpered the Governor in protest. "I shall never play you false! Let me go!"

Sebastian released him with a fling of contempt, and returned to his gloomy contemplation of the crowded blossoms in the patio. There was a long silence. To know himself the victim of so cheap a villain as Fabrique was more intolerable to a man of Sebastian's temperament than even the fact of an incessant payment of blackmail. He had paid deeply for his treachery, but the bitterness which the years had collected round that old memory was directed most of all against Cesar—the cumulative hatred which the injurer inevitably feels for the injured. The mere sound of his dead friend's name drove him beyond himself. Perhaps Fabrique guessed this, for he was now well versed in the art of infuriating his companion with pin-pricks. Presently he ventured to continue:

"You count yourself liberal, Sebastian, but I feel sure Cesar would have paid me double as much to clear his name. He was so generous; but alas! so poor!" He lay back with his hands folded upon his

waistcoat, and looked up reminiscently at the ceiling. "Well, as you say, he is dead and gone these five years. I always liked poor Cesar."

But Fabrique had relied on an extreme of self-command which Sebastian did not possess. What might have happened, or how vital a change might have been wrought in the issues of many lives can never be known, for the house door opened once more with the announcement:

"The señora Doña Carlotta de Lissar, the senorita Doña Dolores de Vayo!"

CHAPTER XXI

DOLORES ASKS A QUESTION

Doña Carlotta paused, half alarmed, on the threshold. The attitude, or rather the aspect, of the two men in the room was unmistakable. Over her shoulder Dolores' dark eyes flashed from one to the other with a strange look. Fabrique started to his feet, and hurried to meet them with effusive welcomes. He hoped that neither of his visitors had noticed signs of the impending quarrel; but Sebastian, standing in the background, had seen the sudden paling of Dolores' face, and knew that she understood the situation and had probably heard the last words uttered by Fabrique—"I always liked poor Cesar." He hung back in a hesitation which for once was quite sincere. Only last evening he had parted from her in anger over that name, and he wondered what conclusions she might draw from hearing it now. She was deaf to the compliments that Fabrique poured into her ears, and she did not look again at Sebastian. She merely stood, tall and unresponsive, in the centre of the room until the servant had closed the door.

"Don Fabrique," she said.

The fat man was busily bestowing Doña Carlotta on a sofa, as if by indefatigable blandishments he clear away all suspicion of the storm which had so lately been brewing. But the arresting note in Dolores' voice struck him with a new sense of uneasiness; yet he made an effort to resume his usual gallantry of manner as he turned to listen to her.

But she cut him short. "As we came into the room,

Don Fabrique, I heard the name of Don Cesar de Lutoleale. What had you to say of him?"

"I—I—was—ah—speaking——"

"You were speaking of the night that the Archduke Paul was killed. You know something, and I know something," she ended slowly.

For an instant the two men stood paralysed. Fabrique's glibness for once failed him; he looked back with a sort of fascination into her dark, steady eyes. But Sebastian rallied at once, and came forward.

"My dear Dolores, we all know something."

"I was speaking to Don Fabrique," she said coldly, without removing her gaze. "Don Fabrique, you know more than you ever confessed. You know it was not Cesar who killed the Prince."

"My dear señorita, why should you imagine such a thing?" expostulated Fabrique.

Sebastian stepped between them.

"You must allow me, Dolores——" he began, with an air of authority.

But she swept him aside, and waited on Fabrique's reply.

"My dear lady, why do you ask me this?" he repeated more confidently.

"Because you saw the deed done."

Fabrique drew in a sudden breath.

"Impossible! I was in the ballroom at the time."

"I think not," said Dolores deliberately. "For, if you were in the ballroom at the time, how was it that Don Cesar met you in the corridor which led to the ante-room, where he found the Archduke Paul lying dead a moment after?"

A new thought hardened on Sebastian's face.

"Who told you that?" he asked roughly.

"Is it not true?" she cried. "Look at him! It is true!"

Fabrique turned with an odd helplessness to Sebastian.

"No, Don Fabrique, I am asking you—you! No one but you! Confess that you saw the Prince killed." Dolores would not be put off.

"Dear lady! Sebastian!" Fabrique looked in vain at his friend, whose countenance was settling into an unreadable expression.

"Oh, you cannot deceive me!" cried Dolores again. "You know who killed the Archduke Paul. I read it in your face."

At last Sebastian spoke.

"Fabrique, the time has come when you must reveal all you know," he said.

"All I know?" repeated Fabrique, astounded. This amazing conversation was sweeping him away from all which ten minutes ago had seemed so secure.

"Yes."

Sebastian must be mad, Fabrique reflected in horror. "But, Sebastian!" he reiterated.

"You must tell everything," continued Sebastian. "Also the reasons which have so long kept you silent; why I persuaded you to be silent. Yes; you must tell Doña Dolores everything; we can hide nothing from her now."

"But, Sebastian!"

"Nothing else remains to do now. You must disclose how you hid in the balcony, how you heard the quarrel, how you saw the fatal thrust when Don Cesar's sword passed through the Prince's body."

"It is not true! It is not true!"

"Yes, Dolores, it is true. Even you must be convinced in the end. I have known all that Fabrique knows for the whole of these five years," Sebastian answered her cry.

"Then why did you withhold your knowledge?" she asked.

He pretended to wince under the question, as if wounded by her incredulity.

"Need you ask? Cesar was my friend. You are more than that to me. So, although I had proof of his guilt, I tried to save him that last disgrace. Don Fabrique would have spoken, but I prevented him. I prevailed on him to keep silence. I was wrong, for even you misunderstood me; and as regards the world he and I are placed in an ambiguous position."

Fabrique, full of admiration for Sebastian's nerve and cunning, felt it was time to play up to his colleague.

"If it were now to be discovered that we had withheld evidence of such importance, the consequences might be terrible!"

Dolores looked from one to the other with her luminous glance, clear as at the first and unconvinced.

"Still, I don't believe it. No!"

"Well, we have done as you wished. You know all that we know." Sebastian shrugged his shoulders. "You have asked us questions, and we have answered them, however reluctantly. Now, in my turn, may I ask you one single question? How do you come to know that Cesar met Don Fabrique in the corridor?"

Dolores saw the mistake she had made in the heat of taxing Fabrique with his guilt of silence. Only Cesar could possibly have told her. She made up her mind what to do. She could not speak the whole truth without disclosing the fact that he still lived, but she would tell half a truth, and back it with a lie if need were. For Cesar's sake she must outrage her conscience, for Dolores was one of those rare women with whom a high probity is an essential of life.

Sebastian could not interpret the meaning of her face.

"I think you owe us an answer," he said.

"You shall have one, Don Sebastian. I know it, because Cesar told me."

Doña Carlotta had punctuated the past half-hour with many exclamations and little cries, but at this she sprang up, and, seizing Dolores by the arm, she shrieked:

"Cesar!"

Dolores looked down at her.

"Cesar himself," she answered gently.

An ashen grey crept up round Sebastian's mouth. His narrow gaze searched her, probing her to her heart.

"Then Cesar escaped and is still living," he pronounced, a deadly animosity weighting every word.

"Sebastian!"

But Fabrique's wail could not annoy Sebastian at that moment, while Dolores, having made her extraordinary confession, stood calm and self-possessed before him.

"Dolores, when and where did you see Cesar?" he questioned. "Now I can understand much that was dark to me before! Come, I demand a reply. When did you see him last?"

She looked back at him gravely.

"In the ante-room, before he leaped from the balcony, five years ago."

He fell back. Not for an instant did he doubt the truth of her answer. She saw it, and moved away from the little group to a chair under the window. Calm as she looked, her limbs were failing; but she had yet a promise to fulfil.

Carlotta and Fabrique stood together by the door of the patio, talking, but Sebastian, more shaken by the danger he felt he had barely escaped, stood beside the office table, brooding. His eyes lit upon her letter to Fabrique. He looked up quickly and walked to her side.

"Dolores, you wished to see Don Fabrique. Was it to ask him the question you just now put to him?"

"No; I had no idea of that until I overheard what he said to you. I came to beg mercy for Robledo, the man condemned to death."

He frowned.

"Why should you concern yourself about him?"

"Because the woman who loves him came to me this morning and implored me to intercede for him."

"But he is a brigand—a follower of Don Q. Who was the woman?" he asked suspiciously.

"She was once my maid. I promised I should beg Don Fabrique to spare his life. But perhaps the power is in your hands rather than in his?"

"Robledo deserves death. He has committed a hundred crimes. Yet, if it were in my power to reprieve him, I should do so because you have asked it. But it is no longer in my power nor in that of Fabrique, for Colonel Matsado, of the Madrid police, comes this afternoon, to take over the whole responsibility of this affair, and all others in connection with Don Q."

Dolores sighed and stood up wearily.

"I am sorry," she said.

But Sebastian was still anxious to propitiate her.

"Perhaps if you were to see Colonel Matsado you might persuade him," he suggested.

"I will see him. When does he arrive?"

"Almost immediately."

"Sebastian!" Fabrique hurried in from the patio. "A man has just been sent in from the camp of the conscripts with an urgent message for you. I am afraid you must go at once. There is some trouble with the men which must be hushed up before Matsado comes," he whispered, drawing the Comandante aside. "You had better see the messenger."

Sebastian eyed the soldier, who came to the door in answer to Don Fabrique's call.

"Who are you? Where do you come from?"

If the man had dealt in facts, he might have said that but a few hours earlier he had helped to confide Colonel Matsado to the shadow of the wineskins in Ramon's posada, but Gaspar looked with awe at the great Comandante, and answered awkwardly: "I belong to the camp, Excellency, and the señor Colonel bade me ride with the news that a mutiny had broken out among the last batch of conscripts. The señor Colonel begs your excellency to ride out to his aid."

"Go back quickly to the camp, and say that I am coming," ordered Sebastian.

The man made off without delay, and Sebastian turned into the room for a last word with Dolores.

"I must ride to the camp, but Don Fabrique will arrange your interview with Matsado, in case I am detained," said he. I will return as quickly as possible.

CHAPTER XXII

HOW DON Q. CAME TO CASTELLENO

THE evening wind from the sea passed with scented breath among the wax-like blossoms in the patio, the palm-leaves clattered softly together, and from the outer gate as from the open window over-looking the Plaza the hum of human life drifted in, awakening with the cool of day. But the office of Don Fabrique lay empty, for he himself was busy elsewhere with half-a-hundred unnecessary preparations for Colonel Matsado's arrival. The ladies had gone for a drive in the interval, but were to return to be presented to the great man.

Having peeped to make sure that no one remained in the office, Lola stole in, and, crossing the floor, searched with shaking fingers among the papers upon the table. They were gone at last, these cruel people who could talk of their own concerns, while under their eyes lay that dreadful writing which signified death to Robledo on the morrow! She must find it, she told herself in order that she might tear it in pieces. Perhaps she had a wild notion that thus she might save her husband. Her nervous hands sent the death-warrant fluttering to the floor, but she caught sight of it as it fell, and pounced upon it. In her agitation she did not hear the door behind her open, and when a hand struck down upon her shoulder she whirled about with a scream, but not too much taken by surprise to forget to hold the paper behind her, clutched in both hands.

"What are you doing?"

The officer with the fierce voice was manifestly of high rank. He wore a black patch over one eye, and under the cold stare of the other she panted, tongue-tied.

"Shall I tell you what you were doing?" he went on harshly. "You were prying among your master's papers! Don't deny it! I see more with my one eye than other men with two. What have you there?"

She raised her sulky eyes.

"A love-letter."

With a slight laugh he snatched the paper from her.

"This is a curious love-letter for a girl to steal," he said. "It is a death-warrant. The death-warrant of your lover—hey? Am I not right?"

She backed away from him.

"I know now who you are. You are the great señor Colonel from Madrid. Yes; I do love Robledo. And you can save him! For the love of the saints, save my Robledo! Pardon him, for he is an innocent man."

She held out her hands imploringly.

"Chut! Are there not other lovers to be had? A pretty girl like you" (he raised her chin with the death-warrant) "cannot long be left unconsolated."

She pushed away the paper violently, and, turning away from him, burst into a tempest of tears.

"They will kill Robledo to-morrow!" she sobbed.

"Lola!"

Her sobs ceased; she stood listening, transfixed.

"He is not a dead man yet," said Don Q., in his natural tone.

She swung round to stare at him, then threw herself at his knees with a half-choked cry of triumph.

"Don Q. has come to save his own!" she said.

"Be silent! Remember, only this eye-patch stands between your Robledo and (shall we say?) glory."

But Lola was full of a new anxiety.

"Master, master, they expect the real Colonel Mat-sado to arrive here at any moment!"

"I know it. Now answer me! Has Don Sebastian been here?"

"He has just left for the camp. A message came——"

"Yes, yes; Gaspar brought it. There are two entrances to this house?"

She nodded.

"One from the Plaza, the other by the patio."

"And Don Sebastian will return by the Plaza? Yes? Then watch for him, and when you see him, call twice as the water-sellers call. You understand?"

"Perfectly, master. The saints watch over you!"

"I trust they may," he said, as he carefully re-adjusted his disguise before the half-hidden mirror by the desk; "but it will keep them busy. I wonder how long Lola would mourn for Robledo if once he were buried? There lies the supreme test of love." He moved about the room as he spoke, as if reconnoitring the position. "A sentry on the staircase! Ah, I have succeeded in rubbing some fear into friend Fabrique!" He lit a cigarette, and once more looked round the room, but with different eyes. "Fabrique's house! And in five minutes I shall see him. And I wonder what will have happened in five minutes more! If Fabrique should by some awkward chance recognise me!"

This scarcely seemed to be the same heart-stricken man who had patrolled the terrace of the Boca de Lobo the long night through. Now he was keen, alert, charged high with a danger-bred joy of living.

Fabrique came in puffing and wiping his brows as he removed his hat.

"A thousand excuses! A thousand apologies, Colonel! You arrived before I expected you." He

bowed profoundly. "Permit me to introduce myself. Fabrique de Borusta, entirely at your service."

The pretended Matsado rose, and spoke with the jocular ferocity of his prototype.

"Always expect the enemy, Governor, always expect the enemy."

Fabrique laughed appreciatively at Matsado's rough joke.

"I am charmed to make your acquaintance, Colonel."

"The honour is mine," returned the other gruffly.

"But to business. I beg to present my credentials. You find them in order, I trust?"

Fabrique glanced through the papers.

"Ah, ah! From the Minister of the Interior! They pay a high tribute to your brilliant services, Colonel. Thanks. I will return them to you. And permit me to add that I am proud to have the coöperation of so distinguished a soldier as yourself in my campaign against this crafty and horrible brigand, Don Q."

Matsado bowed ironically. "You flatter me."

But Fabrique's solemnity was immense.

"No, no, my dear Colonel."

"You think more highly of me than I deserve, my dear colleague. But to return to the matter in hand."

"Presently, presently; when you have rested after your journey. You will, of course, stay here for the night."

"Pardon me." Matsado spoke with characteristic abruptness. "He who rides on the King's business never sleeps, as the proverb has it. It is necessary to act, and to act at once."

"By all means let us act!" bleated Fabrique, beginning to feel hustled by this discomposing energy.

"First, then, who is this Don Z.?"

"Don Q.! Don Q.! My dear Colonel!"

Matsado appeared to accept the correction with impatience.

"Well, then, Don Q. Who is he? What is he? Where is he?"

Fabrique objected to being driven at a gallop.

"One question, Colonel—one question at a time, I beg of you!" he entreated; then added suddenly, with his bulging stare: "Do you know, Colonel, I think that I have seen you before; or you remind me of some one."

But this was a point which obviously failed to interest Colonel Matsado.

"Very likely in some Madrid club," he said unconcernedly. "But at the present we waste time. Now, who is Don Z.?"

"Don Q.! Don Q.! Nobody knows who he is. Q. is a nickname, which stands, as you probably know, for the *quebranta-huesos*, the bone-breaking vulture of these parts; and he is so called because he is villainously thorough in his methods."

Matsado rubbed his whisker.

"Rather an ominous name. What's he like?"

"Of a ferocious and repulsive appearance. Women fly at the sight of him."

Colonel Matsado grunted.

"In which direction do they fly?"

"But away from him, of course," explained Fabrique.

"I supposed it might be into his arms. Brigands are occasionally alluring to the women, I am told. Have you seen the man?"

"Heaven forbid!" cried Don Fabrique, his voice running up to its high register. "Nobody sees him. He lives in mysterious seclusion, deep in the gorges of the mountains, and works always through his men."

Matsado appeared to consider this reply before he asked:

"You do not fear his coming here, for example?"

He knew he was tempting the deadly peril of recognition, but for the life of him Don Q. could not resist

extracting as much amusement from this interview as it could be made to yield.

"Here!" exclaimed Fabrique. "Never!"

"Why not? You say the fellow is daring."

Fabrique's corpulence added a reinforcement all its own to his moments of complacency.

"For an excellent reason."

"Let me hear it, pray."

Fabrique threw out a globular waistcoat.

"He would not dare to face me," he said.

The pretended Colonel Matsado leant back in his chair, a hand on each hip, and allowed his single uncovered eye to take in the Governor's personality. "That point of view had not occurred to me," he observed, "though a desperate man might dare much. But you have no doubt taken precautions for your personal safety?"

Much flattered, Fabrique gave all the information his companion needed, and in a moment of fatuous bragging added that Matsado had only come in time to find him, as he was on the point of leading an expedition against Don Q. in person.

He never guessed to what issues that empty threat would ultimately lead. At once in Don Q.'s mind was born a scheme infinitely more far-reaching and desperate than the rescue of Robledo.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Do not postpone your departure on my account. And with your permission, I will accompany you. We might start at once!"

But Fabrique would not hear of this.

"No, no, no! My expedition is postponed—unavoidably. I must remain here for the execution."

"Whose execution?"

Fabrique shook a bunch of fat fingers joyously in the Colonel's face.

"I wish I could say it was that of Don Q. himself. But you will find that I have not been idle. On



Scene from Douglas Fairbanks' Photoplay, "Don Q, Son of Zorro."

ZORRO AND DON Q FACE THE QUEEN'S SOLDIERY.

Don Q's Love Story.

this occasion it is that of a follower of his, named Robledo, who is, I have discovered, Don Q.'s chief man. He was very neatly caught last Wednesday."

Colonel Matsado was to the full as surprised and complimentary as even Don Fabrique could have desired.

"I congratulate you! The capture of Don Q. himself should logically follow. Of course, you have forced the rascal to betray all his master's secrets?"

"He won't speak, obstinate brute that he is! He can hardly be induced to open his lips, and he has gone so far as to jeer at my authority," admitted Fabrique, moved to outspokenness by his companion's demeanour.

"Amazing! But here at least I may be of some use to you. You say he will not confess? Tut, tut! I warrant that I will make him speak. Let him be brought before me. Send for him."

Fabrique did not welcome this suggestion.

"There is no use in your seeing the man. He will betray nothing, I assure you."

"Pardon me! I have known how to deal with the fiercest of the insurgents in Cuba. Send for him, I beg, without delay."

Fabrique rose reluctantly.

"If you insist——"

"I think it may mean a good deal to you if I succeed," said Matsado, in his brusquest manner.

"True. I will give orders to bring him." He left the room for a moment, and returned. "I have sent a corporal and six troopers. But"—he spread his hands—"I fear you are about to give yourself fruitless trouble, Colonel."

"I hope the upshot may be more successful than you expect. But"—Matsado glowered at him with his single eye—"you understand I must see the man alone."

"Alone? I cannot consent to your running such a

frightful risk. Think of your value to Spain. He is a desperate character; he might attack you."

"We must all risk something for the public service. It is imperative that I see him alone. For one thing, I find a man more apt to be communicative when there is but one pair of ears to hear him."

Fabrique admitted this, but still demurred.

"Besides," continued Matsado, with a sudden ferocity, "I want no witnesses. It may be that if the man proves to be as obstinate as you suppose, I may have to resort to—er—the methods of Cuba. And I need not tell you that the methods of Cuba permit of no witnesses."

Fabrique grinned.

"Ah! the methods of Cuba? I begin to understand!" He laughed aloud as he made a gesture of tightening a screw with his right hand. "Yes, yes; it shall be as you wish. Besides, he will be heavily chained. The scoundrel deserves it. Here he comes! Now, you ruffian, do you see this caballero? This is the great Colonel Matsado, who has come to burn your nest of brigands in the mountains!"

Robledo, grown sadder and thinner in his chains, made no reply, but he turned a faint smile of scorn upon the famous Commissioner.

"Leave him to me!" roared that personage.

The soldiers and Fabrique filed out, and Matsado fastened the inner door after them, and then, pushing to the doors leading to the patio, sat down in his chair.

"So," he said, after a pause, "you are a follower of Don Q.? A follower of a man who is said never to desert his own. Yet he has deserted you, for you are to die to-morrow."

"They tell me so," said Robledo, without interest.

"Do you realise what death means? A cold grave under a prison wall."

"Yes."

"But supposing I offer you life and all that is good in life"—Matsado lowered his voice—"in exchange for a very little information, which no man will ever know that you have given?"

The expression of indifference on Robledo's face remained unaltered.

"Tell me where is the secret gorge called the Wolf's Mouth in which Don Q. conceals himself. Tell me that, and you shall walk out of this room a free man."

"Free if I tell you that?" Robledo's eyes came back from the wind-blown blossoms in the patio.

"Yes; free!"

Robledo shook his head slightly.

"Think again. Free, and with a hundred pesetas in your pocket. On the other hand, if you refuse, by this time to-morrow those fine limbs will be rigid and those dare-devil eyes blind, pressed down with dust," urged Matsado.

The young mountaineer appeared to consider.

"The Boca de Lobo is in——" He hesitated.

"Is in—— Go on! Where?"

"In Spain!" returned Robledo, and laughed insolently.

Matsado's double made an infuriated gesture.

"So! You will sacrifice your life for this master, who, although he is well aware of your danger, has made no attempt to rescue you!"

"Time enough to say that to-morrow!" retorted the prisoner.

Don Q. raised his eye-patch with his fingers as if to look more closely at him.

"You are growing positively witty, Robledo," he said.

The mountaineer's great eyes widened; but before he could speak a loud knocking at the inner door became imperative.

"Colonel! Colonel!" Fabrique cried, at the high alto pitch of excitement, "are you quite safe? Are you still safe?"

"Yes; but I must not be disturbed," replied Don Q. gruffly; then, standing with his back to the patio, he went on in a lowered tone: "Robledo, listen carefully to my orders."

A hurried sign from Robledo cut off the words on his lips. He wheeled round, to find himself face to face with Dolores. She stood between the half-open glass doors, tall and graceful in her black gown. He saw at a glance that she had not only recognized him, but also realised the fearful danger of his presence there at the mercy of his enemies. But her self-command was extraordinary.

"I am Dolores de Vayo," she said formally. "I wish to speak with Colonel Matsado. Will you do me the favour——"

Don Q. swept his hat to the ground, then brought it up again to his breast, as if indicating himself by name.

"Colonel Matsado places himself entirely at your service, señorita," he said.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW DON Q. PLAYED A HAND WITH THE GOVERNOR

DON Q. led Dolores to a seat at the farther end of the room.

"What can Colonel Matsado do to further the wishes of Doña Dolores?" he asked. And his single uncovered eye twinkled as it met hers.

The sting of danger spurred his blood to reckless gaiety.

"What does this mean?" whispered Dolores, with white lips.

"It means that for an hour or two I have borrowed the personality of Colonel Matsado."

"But the danger of it!" Her lovely face was drawn with fear.

"It was unavoidable. How could I show myself here without disguise?"

"Oh, it is venturing too much! I knew you when I heard your voice!"

"You were partially prepared, remember. To all others I am dead. Dear, you are so white!" He took her hands and kissed them. "But don't fear for me. Why, you shall see how well I can play my part." He laughed in Matsado's harsh tones. "I lay myself at your feet, señorita. Condescend to tell me what I can do for your pleasure?"

She smiled faintly, but took up his cue.

"I came to plead for the life of the poor man who is sentenced to death."

"But he is one of Don Q.'s followers," he objected, watching her face narrowly.

"So it is said. But I want to save him, although, perhaps, I am wrong to do so. Yet his wife came this morning and implored me to intercede for him."

"Well, well, perhaps I can save him." Then he dropped back to his own gay manner: "If I am not too busy in saving myself. Though there is not much cause for alarm."

Her glance passed over him. "Your disguise is good. I do not think I should recognise you, except—that my heart would tell me it was you," she ended sadly.

"I have passed muster with Fabrique," he reminded her.

"Ah, it is Sebastian that I fear. You do not know how he can hate, nor how he hates you, Cesar. Suppose he laid a trap for you?" Her lips quivered.

"Why, on the contrary, I have laid a trap for him. He is the only man in Castelleno who knows the real Matsado; therefore, I wanted him out of the way. I sent a message to draw him off to the camp."

"But he will return immediately. He said he would hurry back."

"Let us hope I may be away before then. What I came to do to-day, Dolores, had to be done, whatever the obstacles. But I begin to comprehend from your dread of him, how Sebastian has made you suffer! I could never make up to you for that, even if—— But you must go, darling, and leave me to work out such salvation as is possible for me now."

"Then you have a plan—a scheme?" she exclaimed. "I have heard something which you must know. When I came here with Doña Carlotta, they were disputing about you. I caught your name. Sebastian seemed as if he were going to attack Don Fabrique. Then, Cesar, I disobeyed you"—she

smiled up at him wistfully—"I spoke, I questioned Don Fabrique, who seemed afraid to answer me. But Sebastian suddenly told him to acknowledge that he had been hidden in the balcony that night; that he had witnessed the quarrel, the duel, and he declared that it was you—you, Cesar, who killed the Prince! But he put too false a colouring upon his story when he said that he had persuaded Don Fabrique to hide all he knew for your sake—and for mine—to spare us both. It was false, so palpably, unmeaningly false!"

"Yes," he said, frowning. "But I begin to see light. Only be brave, my darling. Leave all to me. You cannot imagine how greatly you have helped me."

He walked beside her to the door leading to the patio. There she lingered. "Is there nothing more that I can do?" her tear-filled eyes implored him.

"Yes—dear, don't be sad any more; trust me to escape. And—and happier days may be near at hand."

"If I could only know that you were safe!"

He flushed and laughed. "Then you shall know." At such a desperate moment his spirit kindled to hope.

"God go with you, Cesar!" she whispered, and drew away her hand from his.

He stood looking after her, the sense of her love and her loyalty breaking his heart. Had ever such a woman lived on this earth before? She had suffered for him, and believed in him, and stood out for him against all her world, even when the great dissolver of vows, Death, had seemed to rise between him and her.

"Agua! agua! agua helada! Fresquita come la nieve!" The cry of a water-seller rose on the

evening air. Lola's signal! He turned back into the room.

"Robledo, the Comandante will soon be here; and if you and I are not away before he comes, a gay good-night for both of us!"

"Master, save yourself!"

"Silence! Have I given you leave to speak? Listen! if you want to live, you have only to remember that I am Colonel Matsado, and whatever I may say, nod your head."

Robledo nodded, grinning delightedly.

"Confound you, look sulky! Am I not the enemy of Don Q.?"

Robledo glowered obediently, and Don Q., springing to the inner door, threw it open.

"Hola, hola, there! Don Fabrique! Where is his Excellency?"

"Coming! I am coming, Colonel! Is the rascal attacking you?" cried Fabrique.

Don Q. met him as he hurried in.

"No, no. But horses, man, horses!"

Fabrique looked up at the strong, dictatorial figure, flabbergasted.

"But, Colonel, are you leaving us?"

"No, no; we ride together. I'll give the orders, my dear colleague, and explain to you later, as we ride. Corporal, bring up your horses. How many men have you with you on guard? Four? Good! We shall want every trooper on the premises, and horses for his Excellency, myself, and the prisoner. Send a couple of men in to look after the fellow. Come, no time to lose!"

"But, Colonel, I don't understand!" he wailed piteously.

"Cannot you guess?" said Don Q. confidentially, as he drew him towards the patio. "The prisoner has spoken! He had made a clean breast of it. He

has disclosed the fact that Don Q. is to be at a lonely spot—the half-ruined Moorish tower of Manajo—after midnight to-night. Here, is that true?”

Robledo nodded sullenly.

Fabrique drew back, the better to look up at Matsado.

“But even if that be true, what has it to do with me?”

“He will go there with only two of his men. Eh, fellow?” Don Q. struck Robledo roughly. “And a lonely place! What more could one ask?”

“But——” Fabrique wagged a bloated hand in token of his personal rejection of any such undertaking.

“Do you not see that it is your golden chance?” said Matsado, with insistence. “Here is your opportunity to act independently—to prove to headquarters that they were mistaken in supposing you to be a weak man. Much depends on your decision, Don Fabrique. I should like to be able to report of you as a determined magistrate whose individual gallantry was responsible for the capture of the brigand.”

“But you said a lonely place. I hardly think I wish to meet Don Q. in a lonely place, Colonel. Yet——” The appeal to his vanity tugged hard at the faint heart of Fabrique.

“Make up your mind, my dear colleague. We are taking no less than four troopers, with the corporal, who looks to be a tough old soldier. Shall we start? I see the horses are ready.”

“Well, I almost think I will go with you. If——” Fabrique, torn between cowardice and the flattering prospect of being acclaimed throughout Spain as Don Q.’s captor, hesitated.

And while he hesitated, a servant announced that the Comandante was dismounting in the Plaza.

Fabrique looked relieved, but Matsado took command of the situation at once.

"We cannot wait to see any one, not even the Comandante," he warned Fabrique in an aside, then, turning to the servant, added:

"His Excellency is engaged with me for a short time. Pray beg the señor Comandante to be so good as to wait a few moments."

But Fabrique would have rushed after the man had not Matsado held him.

"I should like to consult Don Sebastian. I should wish to ask his advice," Fabrique objected.

"Very well, you shall do as you please," said the other sternly. "Though, as far as your own reputation is concerned, it will, of course, be absolutely fatal. If the Comandante accompanies us who do you suppose will take the whole credit? He will appropriate the entire merit of the affair. Our success, if we have any, will be ascribed to him."

Fabrique's mouth turned down.

"That is true. Sebastian would assuredly take all the credit. But——" He was no more than a poltroon even when his selfish ambitions beckoned him forward.

"Act for yourself! Act independently! Come, such a chance may never fall to you again. Why should Don Sebastian grow famous at your expense?"

Fired with a sudden jealousy and embitterment against Sebastian, Fabrique yielded.

"I will take your advice, Colonel. I will act independently!" He took Matsado's arm with a swagger. "While he comes in from the Plaza, we will ride off through the street on this other side."

"Precisely! All ready, sergeant? Have you tied the prisoner on his horse? He will guide us to the spot." Matsado stepped out through the glass door.

But Fabrique, even at the last moment, hung back upon his arm.

"Stop, Colonel, stop! I really don't think I can undertake it."

The Colonel's one stern eye transfixed him.

"Is it possible, my colleague, that I have been mistaken in you," he asked unrelentingly, "and that you feel nervous at this moment?"

"No, no, I assure you, Colonel! I never recollect feeling more courageous in my life. Still, there is terrible danger."

"Bah! The honour to be won eclipses that! Besides, we shall only direct operations—the troopers will do the rest."

"You are right, Colonel!" cried Fabrique, brightening conclusively. "You are right! Why should we run risks? No, no; we will order the troopers to seize that tiger of a brigand. To horse! To horse!" He chuckled. "We must give Sebastian the slip."

But a servant ran out after them to the patio.

"His Excellency the Comandante sends his compliments, and begs to be received without delay."

Fabrique collapsed.

"Ah! Colonel, what shall we do now?" he murmured aside.

"Why, go on, of course!" Matsado called up the servant. "Be so good as to show the señor Comandante to this room, and say his Excellency has been called away, but he begs that the señor Comandante will do him the favour to await his return."

Once outside the house, Fabrique mounted with what speed nature permitted to his bulk, and the cavalcade set off.

"Ha, ha!" grinned Fabrique, who rode at Matsado's right hand. "Don Sebastian will soon grow tired of waiting."

"But by that time we shall be well on our way. Besides, it will take him some time to find out our destination, even if he should wish to follow us."

And the warm dust rose up in a cloud behind them as they cantered out towards the setting sun.

CHAPTER XXIV

CHECK

DON SEBASTIAN did not find time hang altogether so heavily upon his hands as his friend Fabrique had been pleased to imagine, though it is true that he galloped back in a fury of suspicion and resentment from the camp, having discovered the trick which had been played upon him. He paced the office of Fabrique in a tempest of impatience. He believed that Fabrique, to secure credit for himself in the eyes of Matsado, was showing the great man round, giving away Sebastian's carefully planned designs and precautions as if they were his own. He conjured up the fat man's complacency and babble in a mental picture, till his irritation got the better of him. He would follow Fabrique, make inquiries. He rushed to the bell.

But, before he rang, the servant appeared.

"Has Don Fabrique returned?" Sebastian hurled the question at him.

"No, Excellency, but——"

"But—but—but—— What have you got to say?"

With Spanish circumlocution of courtesy, the man announced that General de Vayo was in his carriage at the gate of the patio, and had asked if the señor Comandante was at liberty and would see him. And, he added, being by no means ignorant of the gossip which linked the names of Don Sebastian and Doña Dolores, the ladies were also waiting in the carriage.

It was dark by this time, and Sebastian, ordering

the lamps to be lit, passed out into the patio. He found the General disturbed and curious about the mutiny among the conscripts, news of which Dolores had carried home to him. She counted on his impatience for further information; she foresaw that he would be eager—as she was herself, for a very different reason—to return to the Plaza Mayor. The result justified her expectation.

“Let us drive you to Don Fabrique’s,” she suggested.

“Por Dios, yes;” chimed in Doña Carlotta. “We may hear of something exciting which will keep us alive a little longer; for, in truth, we are in process of becoming mummies in this dull town!”

Dolores was not only miserably anxious to hear all that had happened in the matter of the pretended Matsado but she hoped to give him more time for escape by drawing Sebastian’s thoughts to herself.

Thus it came about that the Comandante’s time of waiting for the return of his colleague was enlivened in the most agreeable manner. As soon as he appeared under the light of the lantern hanging above the gateway, De Vayo began to question him; but Sebastian was far from wishing the coachman or any chance passer-by to hear that he had ridden out to camp on a fool’s errand. He professed a desire for the General’s advice, and entreated the whole party to do him the favour to descend and to talk over the matter in Fabrique’s office.

As they crossed the patio, Sebastian walked beside Dolores.

“Have you seen Matsado?” he asked in a low voice. “Yes? What did he say?”

“He could not absolutely promise me anything,” she answered in some agitation.

“Ah! He is a rough fellow, and Cuba does not

teach a love of mercy," he responded. "I wish Dolores, that it had been in my power."

"Thank you," she said.

Never before had she spoken so kindly. Sebastian was exultant. He flattered himself that the change was owing to his wise manipulation of an awkward incident. He had lied to her—he had foisted a cruel deception upon her—with the happiest result. He reproached himself for not having thought of this way out of his perplexities earlier.

"Then there was no mutiny at the camp?" exclaimed De Vayo, as soon as they had closed the glass doors behind them.

"No, and nothing was known of the soldier who brought me the message."

De Vayo frowned.

"This is a more serious matter than it looks. It appears to be part of a plot."

Sebastian shrugged his shoulders.

"I know of no plot. However, I am happy to be able to throw all responsibility upon Colonel Matsado. If anything goes wrong now, he will have to answer for it. I am waiting for him to return with Fabrique; they went out before I got in from the camp."

Dolores shivered suddenly.

"What has Matsado come down for?" inquired De Vayo.

"To take charge of the Don Q. affair. I own I think myself ill treated, for I have spent immense labour and thought upon it. I have so crippled Don Q. by increased vigilance, and have so surrounded him with patrols, that he has not been heard of for three weeks."

But De Vayo looked still graver.

"How do you regard this trick to call you out of the way to-day?"

"I think it is no more than a meaningless joke.

Fabrique has not escaped the wits of Castelleno," replied Sebastian carelessly. He was hugely elated by the success of his stratagem in that difficult moment with Dolores, who already shunned him less than had been long her custom. He concluded that the revelation which she had refused to believe at the time was working upon her judgment, and turning her inclination towards himself.

But even the first glow of hope was soured by a lurking rancour; he remembered that she owed him reparation, and he looked on to the day when he meant to exact it from her with bitterness and tears. He was about to conquer; but there was no tenderness, nothing but selfish satisfaction, in his victory. General de Vayo broke in upon his reflections.

"Has it not occurred to you to connect this 'joke' with Don Q.?" he asked, displeased. He had not relished Sebastian's careless rejection of his hint as to the suspicious aspect of the case. "I have good reason to know that he is infernally crafty in concocting ingenious devices for blinding the authorities. I can recollect but one other man of as reckless and original a character——"

The General checked himself abruptly. Nothing could well be more expedient than to revive the name of Cesar at this crisis, when Dolores' feelings appeared to be turning into a more propitious channel. But each person present understood that unspoken word as clearly as if it had been uttered.

Dolores, sank into a chair, holding her hands clenched together in an effort to hide their trembling, for she knew that the most distant hint might serve to call suspicion awake in Sebastian. But the perilous idea seemed to pass harmlessly, and the talk merged into a desultory chatting, of which Doña Carlotta bore the chief burden with her usual vivacity. Dolores, though half her senses seemed absorbed in

an agony of listening, took her part in it which was so new and hopeful a departure that Sebastian was led to forget the passage of time.

The only silent member of the party, General de Vayo, smoked one cigarro after another. He was unspeakably bored, but, with fine parental feeling, forbore to cut short an occasion which might mean the salving of his pride, and eventually the having of his own way in his own household.

When the inner door was hurriedly opened, they all turned quickly to see who entered, and Dolores felt sick with apprehension.

It was only the servant. "A telegram for the señor Comandante."

Before reading it, Sebastian put a question to the man.

"Where has the señor Colonel gone with Don Fabrique?"

"I do not know, Excellency." And he left the room again.

Sebastian, with a "Pardon!" to the ladies, stood by the lamp to read, while they all watched his expression as his eyes ran over the paper. His face grew black and convulsed. When he would have spoken, he merely grimaced under the shock of passion.

"What is it? Speak, speak man! What is it?" roared De Vayo, in his excitement. "What has happened?"

"Colonel Matsado—Colonel Matsado"—Sebastian struggled with the strangling force of his rage—"will not arrive in Castelleno until to-morrow!"

"But he has already arrived! He is already here!" cried De Vayo.

"No; Matsado was found not an hour ago, gagged and bound, at the Posada of Ramon, near the cross-roads."

"Impossible! Did you not tell me that Matsado had been here, and had gone out with Don Fabrique?"

"So I believed. But the papers and uniform of Matsado have been taken. Can you not see what has happened? Fabrique has allowed himself to be fooled by a person masquerading as Matsado," Sebastian said savagely.

Dolores leant against the wall, clutching at the bosom of her dress. What next? What would they do, now that they knew?

"If that be so, what has become of Don Fabrique?" cried De Vayo.

"If I had been here, it could never have been done! I know the real Matsado!"

De Vayo was a grandee of Spain, but he was also a very human man.

"Do you think the trick of your being called away meaningless now?" he demanded. "Here is the plot of which I warned you."

"We must capture the fellow at all risks!" Sebastian tore at the bell.

The servant ran in.

"Send up the sergeant."

"But the sergeant is not here, señor Comandante."

"Then a trooper. Quick!"

"But there is not one left on guard, señor Comandante."

"Not one left! Where are they all?"

Sebastian advanced on the man as if he would strike him down.

"All gone, señor Comandante."

The man stepped back before him.

Sebastian swore a horrible oath.

"Gone! Where?"

"With his Excellency Don Fabrique."

"And what of Colonel Matsado?"

"It was the señor Colonel who gave the orders, Excellency."

De Vayo strode up to Sebastian, and stared him angrily in the face.

"And while we wasted time here, the fellow has escaped!" he shouted.

A sudden, quick laugh broke on the air, and Dolores fell fainting to the ground.

They lifted her to a couch, and Doña Carlotta busied herself about her. But de Vayo seemed too much taken up with the incident in hand to think of his unconscious daughter.

"I can read the riddle," he said bitingly. "It is you—yes, you—who were fooled when you rode away to the camp; and, meanwhile, Fabrique has been carried off. Yes; carried off, I tell you! And by whom, do you suppose? I'll take my oath by no other than Don Q.!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE SECRET OF FABRIQUE

MANAJO, the ancient watch-tower of the Moors, stands high on a peak overlooking on two sides deeply cut ravines. A dense patch of dwarf trees and brushwood clings about its outer walls, save where a tongue of stony land runs up to its heavy portal of stone, which, at the moment Don Fabrique first saw it, lowered like an evil eye in the half lights of a young moon. A more deserted spot could scarcely be imagined, yet as the wind sighed through the thickets it carried with it now and then a rustle or a broken laugh which added a sinister quality to the solitude. A black shadow knocked softly upon the door, then slipped away into the thickets, and at once the absolute silence settled down again over all.

It was a diminished cavalcade which felt its way among the boulders towards the square-headed tower rising dark against a background of star-pierced sky. Some of the men had been detached a league or two back to await the return of the main body, and to strengthen the pretended Matsado's hands if a rescue of Don Q. should be organised by the mountain people. Robledo and the corporal rode ahead, then Matsado and Don Fabrique, followed by a couple of troopers.

The Governor of Castelleno had long ere this repented of the brief blaze of temerity which had stimulated him to mount and ride with this adventur-

ous company on so perilous an enterprise. He had, moreover, become grievously at odds with his saddle, and jogged along, worn and rueful, over the lengthening miles. His horse stumbled and wrung a groan from him.

"It is a villainous path, Colonel," he groaned.

"True, my dear colleague, but the end of it is in sight."

A moment later the horsemen halted under the gloomy pile of masonry, and Matsado's rasping whisper bade the corporal take special charge of the prisoner. At the same moment he swung himself from the saddle, and, creeping up the crumbling steps, slipped suddenly within the closed door. A light shone out, and against it stood the slight, tense figure of the Colonel, holding down a struggling mountaineer.

"We are in good time," he called out. "Corporal, bring in the prisoner. I will keep him under my own eye. Then dismount your men, and get them and their horses out of sight among the trees. Don Q. cannot be far behind us now. Scatter and keep watch. All depends on the next few minutes."

Don Fabrique parted with his horse in an access of joy, qualified by the pain of getting to the ground. He was by habit an indoor man; the open darkness of the night had suggested nothing but horrid dangers to his apprehension. He longed, after the manner of his kind, for the safeguarding and protection only to be felt within walls. He hurried into the tower as fast as his stiff limbs allowed, and slammed the door, as if to shut out some vague pursuing power.

But, when he turned, the aspect of the vast hall in which he found himself struck him as little more reassuring. It was hung with shadows; a fire burning in the centre gave off smoke reddened by

the flames and twisting under the crossing draughts of air, until the whole dim atmosphere seemed moving about the pillars which soared to an unseen roof. Near the fire was a poor bed, with a ragged covering, and on the farther side piles of brushwood for fuel showed obscurely. In front of these Robledo had been thrown upon the earthen floor, with his hands still bound.

Fabrique peered dismally through the smoke drifts.

"Caramba, Colonel, what a horrible place!"

"We'll see if we can mend that," said Matsado with a laugh. "Come, Don Fabrique, the bed will make a chair for you, and I brought a bottle of wine in my holster." He invited Fabrique to the seat beside him. "Come, let us drink confusion to our enemies!"

Fabrique, settling himself on the bed, greeted this toast with enthusiasm.

"By all means, Colonel. Here, fellow," he called to the keeper of the tower, who was busy about the piles of fuel, "bring a light!"

Don Q. poured out another glass.

"A light? What for, my admirable colleague? To see Don Q. by?"

Fabrique started and groaned.

"But, Colonel, you horrify me. You do not expect that monster to come in here?"

"Be calm; the troopers are on the watch outside."

Fabrique subsided, while Matsado nursed his knee thoughtfully. Suddenly a shot outside broke the silence, then loud voices and sounds of fighting. The Governor jumped up, with white, quivering cheeks.

"Colonel, do you hear that?"

Don Q. cocked his ear toward the door.

"What do you hear?"

"There again! You must hear it!"

Three shots in a volley, then two, punctuated the furious noise without.

"I fancy I do hear something," admitted Matsado.

"We must save ourselves, Colonel!" screamed Fabrique, beginning to run up and down. "Don Q. will be upon us. I will conceal myself until you see what happens." He rushed towards the wood piles, but, in front of them, with his long rifle, stood the keeper of the tower, who was simply Gaspar. He turned wildly in the opposite direction, and ran into the arms of Robledo, who, unbound in some mysterious manner, was holding the door.

Fabrique threw back his head and stared at him agape.

"Colonel, we are betrayed! Help, help, Colonel! Here is the prisoner free! Help, help!"

His frenzy of terror lent him a spurious courage. He pulled out his revolver and thrust it point-blank at Robledo, but the young brigand disarmed him with the contemptuous gentleness of a man handling a child.

Fabrique tore himself away, and ran back to Matsado, who still sat smoking on the bed; but before he could speak he made the ominous discovery that the figure was no longer that of Matsado, but of a man wrapped sombrely in a cloak, whose wide-brimmed hat and a half-mask hid his face very completely.

"But, Colonel Matsado——" gasped Fabrique.

"Not much of him left. There he lies." The cloaked man pointed to the eye-patch on the floor. "Sit down, Don Fabrique."

There was no disobeying the voice, which was, however, no longer Matsado's voice. A wild-looking mountaineer entered as he took his place.

"It is done, master."

"Have you secured the corporal and the soldiers?"

"Every one, master."

"That will do. Here, Ostra, let sentinels be placed along the track, so that his Excellency the Governor and I may not be interrupted."

Fabrique had collapsed upon the bed.

"I am betrayed!" he wept. "I know you now. But I am a poor man—a very poor man."

Don Q. laughed.

"You understand the situation, I see. Then we can talk business. It only remains for me to assess your ransom."

"I possess nothing."

"Chut! Spain will pay handsomely to regain the Governor of Castelleno."

"Ah!" moaned Fabrique.

"Pardon me, I forgot. You were to lose your appointment if I took another captive. Well, well, I must take that fact into consideration. Your ransom, my dear Governor, will only amount to"—he appeared to ponder—"50,000 pesetas."

"I have not 500——"

"That is a singularly unfortunate fact for you."

"But if I have not the money?" pleaded Fabrique, in tears.

"That is precisely what I mean. We have our laws in the mountains, as you have yours in the plains. You enforce yours; in the same manner I must enforce ours. The alternative of non-payment is usually most regrettable. If a captive fails to find his ransom, he passes out of my hands. Come forward, men."

Gaspar and Robledo stepped into the circle of firelight; but Fabrique, after a glance at them, buried his face in his hands.

"Can you pay?"

"I am very poor!" sobbed Fabrique.

"Take him away! He is yours!" and Don Q. turned away.

The frigid order shook the fat man to the soul. He struggled in the hands that grasped him.

"No, no, no! I tell you I have a friend who will stand by me! Yes, a friend! a friend! . . . He will not leave me to be murdered! Hear me! Hear me!"

"Bah! I should not rely too much on any man's affection," said Don Q.

Fabrique raised his wet face. "But there are reasons . . . it's true! He'll never let me die! . . . There are strong reasons!" he urged, "if we were alone. . . ."

"Ah, other reasons? That sounds more probable." Don Q. signed to his men to fall back out of hearing. "Now what is the name of this accommodating friend?"

"The Comandante himself! Count Sebastian!" said Fabrique. "He is very rich!"

"You say Count Sebastian will provide you with money for your ransom?"

"I swear it! For his own sake he will not desert me, lest . . . lest. . . . He will rather pay double the ransom!" Fabrique was gaining a certain amount of confidence from the mere fact of being listened to. A project formed itself quickly in his mind.

"So you think that Don Sebastian will be ready to produce 50,000 pesetas to ransom you?"

"He will do more, he will pay 100,000 for me!" Fabrique cocked a cunning eye at Don Q.'s shaded face. "Why not ask him for 100,000?"

"What do you mean . . . precisely?"

Fabrique raised a forefinger and waved it knowingly in the air to punctuate his proposal.

"Simply this—75,000 pesetas for you, my dear friend—and a little percentage of 25,000 for me!"

Don Q. laughed harshly. "An idea worthy of you, my very dear colleague! I felt from the first we should get on together. But how can I be *sure* that Don Sebastian will be so generous?"

"Because he dare not be otherwise! He is afraid of me!"

Don Q. shook his head. "Ah! you forget, my dear colleague, that you told me *Don Q.* was afraid of you!" He laughed again and Fabrique did not join in the laughter. "You see you must really give me those strong reasons you mentioned."

Fabrique cowered. "I cannot tell any one those reasons."

"Believe me, it would be safer, having trusted me so far, to trust me just a little farther. You say Sebastian fears you. Excellent! But prove it. I would always rather realise on fear than on love! Come, let me hear!"

Fabrique rocked himself in sullen anguish. He was about to permit his means of livelihood to slip out sentence by sentence between his chattering teeth, yet what was he to do in opposition to this man whose very name had for long been a terror to him?

"If I confide in you, señor Don Q., the story will be safe with you, I know?" but it sounded less like an expression of belief than a tremulous question as it fell from Don Fabrique's lips.

"As between partners—eh?" was the sardonic rejoinder.

"Yes. . . . Doubtless, señor, you may in your time have heard of a certain Don Cesar de Lutoleale? . . . Ah, I see you have. Well, some five years ago this Don Cesar and Count Sebastian were together at the Court of Madrid. They both loved the same lady, Doña Dolores de Vayo—curiously

enough the very lady you saw to-day during your little masquerade as Colonel Matsado. Don Cesar was the favoured lover. At the time that their rivalry came to a head, great festivities were in progress at the Court, and among the royal visitors was the Archduke Paul. Now it so happened that these two rivals were placed in attendance upon him. One night, when a ball was taking place at the Palace, the Archduke was playing cards in the ante-room of his own quarters, a house on the cliff above the river. I chanced to be on the balcony of the room, unobserved, while the Archduke and Sebastian were there alone. I saw them quarrel, they drew swords on each other. I saw Count Sebastian kill the Archduke."

There was a sharp sound as if a word had been spoken. Fabrique glanced at Don Q. "What did you say?" he asked.

"Nothing," replied Don Q. in his cold voice. "Your story rather interests me, that's all. Pray continue it."

"Ah! but I have not come to the really interesting part yet! To go on—no sooner was the Archduke dead than I made my escape from the room while Sebastian was engrossed with the horror of the deed he had been guilty of. As I ran down the corridor I met Don Cesar returning to the ante-room! . . . You will admit it was an opportunity for Don Sebastian, and he knew how to take advantage of it very thoroughly! He hid himself behind the door and struck at Don Cesar as he entered. Before Don Cesar could turn he had slipped through the door, closing it behind him. Do you follow me?"

"Most minutely. And I conclude that Don Sebastian's clever trick achieved success?"

"Immense success! Sebastian at once gave the alarm. People rushed in. Don Cesar was found

alone with the dead body! He was accused . . . the evidence was all against him."

Don Q.'s steady hand knocked the ash from his cigarette. "Even yours, my virtuous partner?"

"I . . . I did not give evidence. In point of fact I had no time to do so. Don Cesar at once committed suicide," stammered Fabrique.

"Ah, Cesar committed suicide? And what did you do then?"

"I went to Sebastian . . . I reproached him. . . ."

"Why, of course you did! You were so sorry for Don Cesar, were you not? Your qualities of heart, my dear Don Fabrique, amaze me! And so you forced this Sebastian to speak and thus cleared the dead man's name?"

"Of what use would that have been to any one?" retorted Fabrique, with something of a feeble humour.

"I served myself, señor, and therefore I am to-day in a position to serve you."

"That is true." Yet the endorsement in those icy tones infused anything but courage into the listener's mind. "But why waste time in recalling a dead man's wrongs? What I want to hear is, how, having his secret, did you continue to keep your hold over Don Sebastian, who is, they say, a dangerous man?"

A tinge of self-complacency showed in Don Fabrique's pallid face. "I flatter myself I handled him adroitly. I offered him a choice. Either I would tell all that I had witnessed, or he should write me a letter confessing in full the part he had taken in the affair of the Archduke Paul. I acted in self-defence, for my life would not have been worth a day's purchase had I not insisted on the security of that letter."

"Admirable! You are a master of strategy after all, my dear colleague," said Don Q., with a derisive

touch of Matsado's accent. "And in this way you forced Don Sebastian to write a confession?"

"You will perceive that he was obliged to write it. Though I declare to you that, had Don Cesar survived, I should have done him justice."

"Enough! Where is this confession you speak of?" Fabrique blenched.

"In my strong-box—in my house at Castelleno."

Don Q. lit a cigarette, looked at the burning point, and then said:

"That letter, Don Fabrique, shall represent your ransom."

"If you will permit me to return to Castelleno, it shall be in your hands to-morrow."

Fabrique erected himself on the edge of the bed, with a sound of hope in his voice.

Don Q. laughed aloud.

"You propose that I should trust you?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"Why not, indeed! Ah, Don Fabrique, you forget that I am not as Cesar de Lutoleale was—a fool, an unsuspecting fool, who believed in Don Sebastian and in his world! No; I am Don Q. the brigand, the outlaw, the man of hard experience, who believes in nothing—nothing that his hand cannot take. You say the letter is in your strong-box. Give me the key of it."

Fabrique pulled out a key, with reluctance, and handed it over.

Don Q. rose and spoke a few words to Gaspar which Fabrique could not overhear.

"I am sending for the document by a safe hand. Until it arrives, I shall leave you in the care of this man. If your information turns out to be true, he has orders to release you; if it turns out to be false, you may be sure that my men will know what to do with you. Take the señor, and go!"

But Fabrique struggled furiously under Gaspar's heavy grasp.

"One moment! One moment! Give me a moment more!" He leant towards Don Q. "I find that I have made a little mistake. I have just remembered. The letter is not in the strong-box."

"It is lucky that you remembered in time! Then where is it?"

Fabrique fumbled in his breast.

"I—I have an idea that it may be in here."

He shook his head hopelessly as he brought out a document from an inner pocket.

Don Q. glanced over it.

"Gaspar, remove his Excellency!"

"But you promised to release me! Are you not satisfied? Oh! oh!"

"Yes, satisfied!" Don Q. still held the paper before his eyes. "Satisfied—at last." He folded the paper. "And you shall be released in good time."

"But . . ." began Fabrique.

"Silence! you will release his Excellency at five to-morrow morning, Gaspar, and an hour later you will follow him with every available man and dog. Take him out of my sight! Take him out of my sight!"

A man of imagination thrown by violence of circumstance into a position hopelessly alien to his past must, after a time, begin to weave a veil about its naked outlines. To put it in other words, the healing processes of Nature draw together the torn tissues of feeling, yet leave scars ineffaceable and sensitive; life only goes on under changed conditions. So it had happened to Cesar de Lutoleale during the period of his transmutation into Don Q. of the sierra.

Slowly his point of view had shifted. The tremendous injustice that destroyed him forced his mind to dwell upon the universal injustice which mars the lot

of humanity. The fact loomed large before him, it cut deeply into his consciousness; so that when the chance of power offered he seized upon it, filled with the desire to defend those that had no helper, and to deal out an even-handed justice to as large a section of mankind as might fall within the limit of his authority. He had accomplished all that he hoped, and not one sordid act had soiled his high emprise in the doing. He had levied his tax upon the well-to-do—as Governments levy theirs upon populations—for the maintenance of administration; never for a purpose of self-enrichment.

The hill people within the borders of his domination lived content and securely. The vagrants themselves, formerly a terror to the gorges, he held in leash, and disciplined to his will. Good, and not evil, had been the outcome of his lordship throughout that wild land.

As the fire died down neglected in the hall of Manajo, Cesar de Lutoleale sat with his head in his hands and looked upon some such picture of the past. He had no cause for regret or for shame. Yet, as the remembrance of Dolores rose between him and his vision, the hues of romance faded, and he saw himself through her eyes as no more than the leader of a lawless company.

The leader of a lawless company! The words seemed shouted in his ears. He leaped to his feet and swung round with his arm raised as if against a living foe. She must be told all. And what then? His arm fell. Yes, she must be told, but by his own lips. No other could speak as he himself. No other should! He owned her that much, at least. Though the road led to death he would go to Castelleno to see her.

For he realised that the carrying-off of Fabrique and the trick played on Matsado doubled the perils before him. Matsado would be remorseless in his

pursuit of the man who had made him the laughing-stock of Spain, and worst of all Sebastian and Matsado between them held, though unconsciously as yet. the secret of the identity of Don Q.!

He must act at once! He sprang to his feet and hurried to the door. Robledo stood upon the threshold.

"Master, do we ride to the Wolf's Mouth?"

"No. I ride to Castelleno."

"And you return, master?" ventured Robledo.

"When God wills!" Don Q. checked himself and looked out into the vast void of the night, over-spangled with the remote lustre of the stars. "Or . . . if God wills, Robledo!"



Scene from Douglas Fairbanks' Photoplay, "Don Q, Son of Zorro."
Don Q's Love Story.
A PRECARIOUS PROPOSAL WAS CHARACTERISTIC OF DON Q.

CHAPTER XXVI

LOVE, THE CONQUEROR

CASTELLENO is a city of many trees. You will find them in the plazas, waving high over garden walls, lurking in odd corners, or sentinelling the waysides with here and there bosky coverts of tropical shrubs set thick with blossoms that steep the glorious Spanish night in their own languor and romance.

Beside a neglected road leading to the barrier stands the noblest group of trees within the city. One or two have been branch-torn and dismantled by time, yet some remain in perfect beauty, and at all hours hold a patch of heavy shade in the dust at their feet. The moon was not yet risen, but a brilliant starshine lay faint upon the road, and, almost invisible among the tree-trunks, a horse stood patiently, the reins drawn forward over its downbent head, and left to trail in the sand, according to the immemorial custom of Spain. His master's footsteps, muffled by the heavy dust of the road, had quickly been swallowed up in the distant noises of the town. The cigalas chirped more loudly than before, and dwarf whorls of powdered mud rose and fell over the ruts, although little wind was stirring.

Don Q. had passed through seventeen hours crowded with adventure and evasion, and with the gathering of such knowledge as seemed necessary to his safety while he lingered in the city. When night had fallen, leaving his horse in a convenient place of concealment, he made his way towards General de Vayo's house. For a while he became one of the half-score

of shadowy figures who loitered about among the shrubs of the Plaza. Across the roadway in front of him he could see the tall iron gate around which the dim overhanging lamp cast a shifting light.

Presently a carriage came rattling into the Plaza. Don Q. at once changed his position and became a shadow leaning against one of the lower barred windows of De Vayo's house. The gate clashed back and old Arturo with the porter came through, the door of the carriage opened and the plump shape of Doña Carlotta entered the gateway. The men stood talking with the coachman, a woman servant stepped out to join them, there was a bustle in the unsteady light, Arturo cursed loudly and volubly, the maid screamed as she blundered into the embrace of the porter; the carriage drove away, the gate clanged again and left one shadow the less in the Plaza.

For Don Q. taking advantage of the stir and hubbub in the dusk, had meantime flitted unperceived into the patio. Breathless among the leafage which hung over the fountain and filled the central square of marble tiles, he waited until the men had returned to their quarters; then—for in former years he had known the house well—he swung himself up to the gallery, and ran along it soft-footed, so through a small room toward an open door, from which light issued faintly.

He stood looking into a long saloon, with a high, decorated ceiling and a huge door set at the farther end. Couches and tables, interspersed with tree-pots and flowers, showed under the soft lights, and there, not ten feet from him, he saw Dolores. She half lay upon a couch, idly fingering a guitar: above her, the statue of a boy leading a fawn shone white against a background of bushy green, surmounted by the drooping head of a palm. The boy's pure profile was not more exquisite and hardly paler than her own. Cesar,

stood quivering. She was changed. This was not the laughing, radiant girl he had held in his arms under the moon in the garden at Madrid, but a woman, sorrowful, yet far more beautiful, far more heart-compelling. God, to know he must never claim her for his own.

The guitar accompaniment gathered to passionate chords:

"Where dost thou wander, love? Where dost thou wander?
Under the starshine thy bed must be.
Wild as the night-wind, love; sweeter and fonder,
Call me to follow. I'll come to thee."

Dolores sang under her breath, as one who sings to her own heart. Her fingers, moving among the strings, repeated the refrain:

"When shall I find thee, love? Where shall I find thee?"

She broke off as if conscious of some presence close at hand, and languidly turned her head.

At the sight of the cloaked man she sprang up.

Then——

"It is you, Cesar!"

He flung off his sombrero and she saw his face set to a look she had no clue to read.

"You have ventured to enter this house," she whispered, "though you know the danger! My father..."

"It was necessary that I should see you, speak with you!...I promised that you should be the first to hear when I had anything to tell."

She ran to his side.

"You mean that you have succeeded in finding out the truth?"

"Yes, I know everything that Fabrique could tell me."

She clasped her hands together.

"At last! At last! You can clear yourself, you can prove your innocence now!...Oh, Cesar! I never

dreamed I could be so happy again!...How I have prayed for this!..."

He looked at her upraised face alight with a pure fervour of devotion, and his mood sank to a lower despondency. With what eyes would she regard Don Q.?

"Tell me about it!" she pleaded eagerly. "When my father returns we will go to him together and then all the world shall hear the truth about you, that you were wrongly accused, that you suffered wrongly! Your name will stand high as it stood before!... But tell me quickly what Don Fabrique confessed to you."

"Darling, you shall hear all soon. . . . But now I have something I must say to you. Something that I have come to say."

He stood looking at her with strange eyes that chilled her joy. She put out her hand.

"Come, we will go to the balcony. No one will disturb us there." She walked beside him through the long room, talking gaily that he might not guess that he had saddened her. "We have a reception to-night in honour of Colonel Matsado!" she laughed, glancing up at him.

Cesar smiled grimly. "And Matsado is out on the mountains searching for Fabrique and . . . Don Q."

"But Sebastian will be here. My father insists that I must listen to him for the last time—that I must choose to-night between marriage with him and——" She paused.

"And——?" questioned Cesar.

"The Convent of the Sacred Heart."

They were standing together on the dim balcony. Far across the sea the moon, very young, very slender and silver pale, lay upon the horizon. Cesar took both her hands in his.

"After to-night, darling, Sebastian will never trouble you again. Many things must be made clear to-night," he said.

"To-night! You mean you will prove to-night who killed the Archduke?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I can vindicate the name of Cesar de Lutoleale, the name of the man you loved, Dolores. I can do that." He paused and for a moment he shrank. In what words could he tell her the manner of his life during those five years while she mourned him as dead?

She clung to him, trembling a little. "What has happened since I saw you last? You are changed. You were full of hope then."

"Ah, yes; I forgot everything in the unexpected happiness of seeing you. You altered the colour of my world then," he said.

"But I am the same," she urged. "I am not changed." She fought against his sorrow that she did not understand, and which yet filled her with dread. "Our sad days are over, Cesar, but you have suffered so much that you will have to learn to be happy again," she went on in her tender effort to cheer him.

With a gentle hand he loosened the fingers on his sleeve and drew back.

"My darling! I have not been the chief sufferer. I know that. I have spoiled your life!"

"What does the past matter now? The long months, the dark empty days are gone. We will think of them no more. We will forget them and look forward to the future and all the happiness it holds. . . . I can see what is coming! The whole world will honour you, will make you reparation for the cruel injury done to you. My belief in you will be gloriously justified. Cesar, think of it, think what your finding out the truth means to both of us!"

He stood silent, making no response, and though

he had turned away his head he knew how the look of fear and unhappiness was creeping back into her eyes, her dear, lovely eyes, that only a moment ago were full of joy.

"Is it . . ." she began breathlessly after a pause. "Cesar, is it that you love me no longer?"

"Love you?" he repeated, a rough outbreak of his passion conquering him at the timid question. "God knows it! Five years ago I loved you, but that was nothing to the worship I feel now! You have grown dearer and dearer, you fill my heart. There is nothing on earth for me but you! Wherever I am, and . . . whatever I am, I love you, love you!"

She smiled again through her gathering tears.

"Then all is well. I want no more!"

"Ah, but you don't know all. There is something else, something you could not even guess. You could never imagine it. I came to tell you myself, that you might not hear of it from others. I am making you a sad return for all your love, my darling, for all your faith in me. You have been true to me when any other woman would have forgotten and forsaken me. You believed in me against belief——"

"How could I doubt you? It was impossible," she said simply.

"Yet I was not worthy of your trust. I have thrown away all the happiness of the love you would give me to-day if I were worthy of taking it. I could not foresee to-day. Fate blinded me!"

She timidly came closer to him, all her beautiful face transfigured by her thoughts. "If you love me, Cesar, nothing else is of any consequence."

"Dolores, do you recollect what you said about Don Q.?" He went on as if he had not seen her.

"Those words have haunted me.

"Hear me!" he went on. "Five years ago, when I recovered from my wounds, after I escaped the flood in the river, I fled to the sierra. Heaven knows I was reckless enough! I was driven beyond caring what became of me if only I could by any means compass the vindication of Cesar de Lutoleale, if I could by any means fasten the guilt on the man who betrayed me. For that purpose, to do that, it was needful for me to remain in Spain unknown, unrecognised, always on the watch for any proof against my enemies. I was playing a desperate game. Only one way seemed open to me."

He paused as if he expected her to speak, but she stood absolutely still, listening.

"Can't you understand—can't you understand?" he broke out. "Can't you guess why I played the part of Colonel Matsado?"

He could see her trembling.

"I—I imagined Don Fabrique——"

"Why did I rescue Robledo?" he hurried on. "Why am I here stealing your presence, with my horse ready for flight hidden among the trees on the road? Is it not plain? Won't you understand?"

His agony roused her. She raised her face.

"Robledo? He was one of Don Q.'s men. Cesar! Ah, you cannot mean—mean——" Her whole body bent towards him, her eyes met his and she whispered: "Don Q.?"

He turned away that he might not see her face alter, become cold, alienated. He could not endure to watch that change! He felt that he had with his own hand killed her love for him. In the silence he heard her sob.

"Don't!" he cried. "Don't waste your sorrow upon me, Dolores. I am not worth it; not worth a single tear of yours. You are a good woman—a saint. No wonder you condemn me!"

But still she did not speak, and at last the hope of gaining even one forgiving word failed him. He sighed silently and moved to the door.

"God be with you!" he said gently.

But she stopped him with a cry.

"Cesar!"

Her arms were stretched out to him, the tears were falling from her eyes.

"Cesar, never until now have I realised the mortal injury they did you—nor your trouble, nor the agony you have endured! . . ."

"My darling! It is only your love that speaks."

She drew herself away and stood to her full height.

"What? Do I not understand that you were driven beyond endurance? You were judged on a hasty accusation and not one man would listen to anything you could have said to clear yourself. They refused to hear you, they cast you out! They would have hunted you down like a wild beast if they had discovered your escape. There was no justice left in Spain for you! Innocent as you were they thrust you outside the law! . . . Who shall blame you that you became a law to yourself and to those whom the law was driving to death and who looked for you to safety? Is that guilt?"

Cesar listened amazed. He had expected many things of Dolores' love but not this! Not this amazing insight of sympathy which gave her knowledge of the wild thoughts and feelings that had swayed him during the past bitter years!

"Many would call it guilt," he answered sadly. "Even I myself . . . at times. . . . But that you should understand, you should be able to judge truly and fairly of that life, is one of Love's miracles."

Dolores scarcely seemed to hear. She went on as if inspired:

"You have lived the life of an outlaw, yes, but

when you have said that, you have not said all. . . . They tell stories of your doings up there at San Vicente, how you have given the peasants a peace and a justice they could never find in the courts of the land. Is that nothing? . . . They knew that no one could hoodwink you, and, still more, no one could bribe you. You sought out the truth, and you gave them even-handed judgments. They said that the people for leagues used to flock to you to settle their disputes and quarrels. Go to any village or hut in the sierra, and you will hear of their gratitude to Don Q."

"But you would hear other stories too . . . of prisoners to ransom . . . and foiled expeditions that left their dead in the mountains."

"Were they not seeking your life and the lives of those who were with you? You balked the usurers. I have heard of that. You were chivalrous to women, you were generous to the poor."

"Dolores, you have given me back courage. I can go on now to the end." He drew her close into his arms. "Darling, in spite of all you love me?"

"You are the man I have loved as long as I can remember, and I love you still."

His lips were on hers. Presently she whispered, looking up into his face:

"You will leave the sierra and . . . your life there? We will forget the past. Where you go, I will follow you, then I may see you look happy again—some day, for we will only remember that we love each other."

"My love! My darling! Dolores!"

Who can tell if those two ever tasted so divine a moment of life again?

CHAPTER XXVII

CHECKMATE

THE great gate was open, and the patio, the gallery above, and the high long rooms were full of light. Voices and laughter filled the cool night air that blew in from the sea, catching as it passed over the balconies the fragrance of the *Dama de la Noche*.

Presently the sound of music stole in among the talk and silenced it as a violin and piano mingled the exquisite harmonies of Ocon's *Rapsodia Andaluza*. Yet the interval was not altogether without language in a country where pretty wrists and fans and dark eyes are always eloquent.

General de Vayo, seated not far from the door of the outer salon, tried hard to conceal his growing impatience, for the night was passing and Count Sebastian had not yet appeared.

The music ceased just as a servant announced the Count of Lucharvo, and under cover of the applause General de Vayo put his eager inquiries.

"Well, what has happened? What has detained you, Sebastian?"

"I was waiting for definite news, sir. None has so far come in. But Matsado is furious at the trick played upon him and he has gone to find Fabrique and Don Q. in a spirit that will not endure defeat." He smiled sourly. "Fabrique's folly is believable, but that a man like Matsado should have been so successfully hoodwinked passes comprehension."

"We will pardon him that if he captures Don Q.," commented De Vayo.

"His capture is quite certain. Don Q. cannot escape now."

Dolores and Zurcanez came up as he spoke.

"Why?" her dry lips could scarcely frame the question.

"Matsado will hunt him down in the sierra."

Dolores turned away laughing softly.

"Why are you laughing, dear Doña Dolores?" asked Zurcanez, as they crossed the room.

"At Don Q.'s capture! . . . One has heard of it so often!"

"True, but it must come some day. What a feather in Sebastian's cap!" He watched her face as he spoke, for all the world knew a good deal about the affair of Count Sebastian's love for this beautiful woman.

She sat down on a couch, motioning her companion to take his seat at her side.

"Why, no, not in Count Sebastian's cap, but in that of Colonel Matsado . . . if he is successful!" she laughed, flicking her fan together a little scornfully.

Zurcanez, who in the old days had liked Cesar well, but Sebastian not at all, felt suddenly in sympathy with her.

"Sebastian has influence. He will secure his share of the credit whatever happens! . . . a lucky man!"

Other men gathered round and the conversation turned to lighter topics with laughter and repartee, when Sebastian's dark, narrow face entered the circle. He was evidently in good spirits, and well-nigh thrust Dolores' little court aside. They moved away one by one, but Zurcanez held his position, secure in the knowledge he believed he had just gained of her wishes.

Sebastian stared at him fiercely.

"Doña Dolores requests you to be so good as to

bring her her fan, which," Sebastian ended meaningly, "she has left in the other room."

Zurcanez raised his head haughtily and glanced from Dolores to the fan she closed in her consternation. Then seeing the pallor on her face he rose and, bowing deeply, left them together.

Dolores flashed round upon Sebastian.

"This is too much! What can they think of——"

"Of us?" he smiled unpleasantly, then changing his expression. "Forgive me!"

"No, it is more than I can bear!"

"Dolores, a woman finds it easy to forgive a man who errs through loving her too much! I could not delay another moment. I am impatient to hear my fate. I have obtained a good many things I wanted in my life, now my heart is fixed on one alone. Am I to have it?"

He was handsome enough and manly enough in his dark crafty fashion, he challenged her with his narrow eyes.

"I have said all I ever mean to say to you on that subject," she replied coldly.

"Dolores, I will surround you with love and worship! Once you are my wife, I will compel you to love me. My whole life will be yours!"

Luckily they were seated on a couch somewhat screened from view by the formation of the rooms and a bank of flowers that stood by the piano. He moved nearer to her.

"Once I hold you in my arms——"

Dolores shrank away in a disgust that must have convinced another man.

"Never! . . ."

"Is that your answer?" his dark eyes blazed. "Dolores, I have power . . . I adore you . . . I am rich . . . I have everything to offer you. . . ."

"Keep them for a woman who can love you,"

she replied impatiently. She could imagine how much attention was being bestowed upon their half-refuge by every person in the room.

He smiled with a strange exultation of look and manner that terrified her.

"I *have* kept them for a woman who shall love me!" he exclaimed. "I feel that good fortune is coming to me to-night! That to-night I shall hear of the capture of Don Q. . . . that to-night I shall hear you promise to be my wife!"

She turned and looked him steadily in the face. "Have you forgotten all that I said to you? . . . Have you forgotten . . . Cesar?"

He started and scowled. "Always Cesar!"

"Always . . . as long as I live!"

"Even in the face of what Don Fabrique told you of his guilt?"

"Cesar was not guilty!" she exclaimed with a joy of triumph that maddened him.

He frowned. "You . . ."

But as she spoke she caught both hands to her breast with a low cry.

"Ah!" She was listening.

From the farther end of the salon a voice spoke clearly.

"His Excellency Don Cesar, Count of Lutoleale and Tarazo."

A strangled exclamation broke from a score of throats, then followed deep silence. Sebastian sprang up and looked.

"My God! It is Cesar!" he said, as if to himself, and stood a second transfixed. Then he rushed forward.

"Seize him! seize him!" he shouted.

Rendering the involuntary obedience of a crowd to a strong command several men advanced.

Cesar looked round upon them. He was the same

gallant figure that many of them remembered in the old days at Madrid, although his handsome face was grown worn and lined, for sadness had replaced the laughter in his eyes and altered the mocking, reckless, lovable man to a sterner mould.

"A moment, gentlemen!"

"He escaped that night five years ago!" cried out Sebastian. "Don't let him escape again!"

There was a movement as before, but Cesar raised his hand.

"I would remind you, gentlemen, that I am here of my own free will."

The stern words took effect, the circle hovered and stood at gaze. Then General de Vayo, stepping out from it, confronted the single lonely figure.

"How comes it that you dare to show your face here?" he asked coldly.

"Because five years ago you condemned me unheard and unjustly. I have come to clear myself of that accusation."

"Had you the power to clear yourself a more private occasion would have better suited such a matter."

It was the old Cesar de Lutoleale who met this with a mocking smile.

"No, sir; the accusation was made in public, so in public it must be refuted."

But Sebastian could no longer restrain himself. He thrust forward.

"General, will you listen to this man?" he said, in the thick voice of a frenzy of anger. "I tell you he has blood upon his hands! I tell you it was no fair fight. I tell you he murdered the Archduke!"

Cesar caught him up. His voice rang out.

"Murder!" he said, and every listener seemed to stop breathing to listen. "Yes, it was murder!"

Don Sebastian, you use the right word. But it was not I who was guilty of it!"

The madness of hatred surged up in Sebastian. That Cesar should return—the man who alive or dead seemed to have the power to balk him—the man he had swept from his path in vain!

"Of what use is your denial when I have a witness who can prove . . . what I have said!"

The crowd drew in with quickened curiosity.

"A witness, Sebastian!" General de Vayo exclaimed, "I never heard of this before!"

"Let Don Sebastian produce his witness, said Cesar, in his mocking voice. "I am ready to meet him."

Sebastian glared round in exasperation. Fabrique had dogged his life for the past five years and now on this one supreme occasion he was absent! "He is not here, but . . ."

"I also have a witness," continued Cesar.

"Whom then do you accuse, Don Cesar?" General de Vayo's harsh tones recalled to some present the scene in the ante-room years before.

A hush preluded the answer.

"Count Sebastian himself!"

"It is a lie . . . a lie!" The blood rushed back into Sebastian's face.

"And luckily I have my witness with me," went on Cesar's inexorable voice. "General de Vayo, I ask you to read this."

Sebastian would have snatched the paper as it passed from Cesar's hand, but de Vayo intervened.

"Stand back, Don Sebastian! You may trust me. There is much to be proved beyond this document, which seems to be in your handwriting."

The tall white-bearded old man standing in the eager throng of his guests slowly unfolded the document. Sebastian recognised it, and in that moment

hope passed from him. It was the paper that Fabrique had forced him to write . . . those fatal words against which there was no appeal. He knew that in all Spain there was not one man who would pity him, his treachery had placed him beyond the pale of excuse. Before him rose the long friendless future of execration . . . an awful future, not to be faced! Yet he was not altogether so helpless as Cesar imagined . . . there remained one other act to be consummated that would give him the revenge he panted for, revenge on both of them! . . . both of them, Cesar and Dolores! The flash of thoughts is timeless, and Sebastian was already backing his way to the salon door, where he had left an orderly to be on hand in case news arrived that might have to be dealt with—before De Vayo's strident tones began to be heard:

"Gentlemen, this document contains the following extraordinary statement:—'I, Sebastian, Count of Lucharvo, hereby acknowledge that I fought with and killed his Imperial Highness, Archduke Paul . . .'"

A loud tumult drowned his voice. He turned his head and saw Sebastian with a grey savage face forcing his way through the crowd towards Cesar.

"He has a revolver! Stop him!" called out Zurcanez as he with one or two others gripped hold of Sebastian.

Sebastian swung his captors right and left, there was a terrible moment of struggle, then Sebastian suddenly gave way. Perhaps he recognised the hopelessness of his position, he flung off the loosened hands upon him, he sprang through the door, there was a loud report.

"He has shot himself! Sebastian has killed himself!"

Men called out, women screamed, there was a

rush from the room. General de Vayo made his way through the crowd, the Marquis de Zurcanez following him. In a moment Zurcanez returned. Cesar stood where he had left him in the centre of the empty salon, and at his side Dolores.

"Oh, Cesar, what has happened? What has he done?" she whispered, shaken with horror.

It was Zurcanez who answered her.

"He is dead, Doña Dolores, by his own hand. Dead, self-condemned of the crime for which you, Cesar, my friend, have paid so heavy a penalty." He put out his hand. "I will see you again, but for the moment General de Vayo needs me."

"Darling," said Cesar gently, "Sebastian is dead, he will trouble you no more."

"I can thank heaven for that!" she answered, raising her brave eyes. "But if they question you now . . . the confession and Don Fabrique. . . . If they guessed about . . ." she lowered her voice, "Don Q."

Cesar placed his right hand over the two small clinging hands on his breast and smiled.

"Don Q. is dead too, my darling. He has played his part. Only Cesar de Lutoleale lives."

"Then you will not leave me!"

"For a little, perhaps, dear, but not for long."

They stood together for a moment in a silence that between those two was more eloquent than words; but the people were beginning to stream back into the salon, and as Cesar moved slowly to the door, Zurcanez first, and then others who had known him in the old life, welcomed him back amongst them. To all their cordial speeches, Cesar only inclined his head as he made his way through the throng. At the door he turned.

"Gentlemen," he said, "for the second time, good-night!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LAST SCENE

SUCH is the love story of Don Q. of the sierra, and but little remains to be told. After that night Cesar de Lutoleale and Tarazo was not seen again. The facts on record are few—that the King of Spain restored him to his honours and estate, but the estate passed into the hands of trustees and the honours were never claimed.

Far away from Spain the evening sun was shining aslant across green *vegas* where herds of cattle wandered for miles about a white-walled estancia set in the midst of a broad plain. In the shade of the house a woman stood and watched a black dot in the eye of the sun grow larger and larger, until it resolved itself into a horseman riding at speed. He flung himself from the saddle to take her in his arms. "What is it, Dolores? Were you anxious about me?"

"No, dear," she answered, but with a little hesitation. "Only I cannot be happy when you are long out of my sight. You are later to-day." She passed her hands across his brows. "You look happier every hour, my husband."

They stood hand in hand, looking out over the quiet of the scene.

"There was a time I could never have dreamed of this," he said.

"Yet it has come!"

"Yes." His eyes grew troubled. "But how long

will it continue, this ideal life? A chance guess, a suggestive word is enough to shatter all."

"But no one knows."

"Why, so we believe." Cesar's arm drew her closer. "But who can forecast to-morrow? The old troubles have left me timid of happiness. I dare not look to the future, even yet."

"Dear, God is not cruel."

"If only I could wipe out those years! If Don Q. had never been!"

She drew his hand to her lips and kissed it.

"Forget those years, love. Do not let us expect sorrow. We have this—our glorious life. Let us enjoy it."

"Yes; while it is ours. Nothing can hurt me while I have you, Dolores."

And so we may take leave of them, while the voice of Dolores carried out to the dusk and coolness the story of her own heart:

"Where dost thou wander, love? Where dost thou wander?

Under the starshine thy bed must be.

Wild as the night-wind, love; sweeter and fonder,

Call me to follow. I'll come to thee."

And who shall blame her, who loved so much?

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